

Asgard

D20 System Magazine



**Crescent Island
Spellsinger**
Unleash the Power of
the Sea

Shieldmaiden
A Class with Virtue

Back in the Academy....
Guidlines for Fighting Schools

A Murder of Ravens
Cyberzombie's Education Skill
System



Morrus Dancing

I've recently been plunged into the d20 publishing world - many of you probably know about Natural 20 Press, the new EN World community publishing company, and the first product for that imprint, Wild Spellcraft. I've spent the last month organising writers, artists, layout people, graphic design, advertising and more - and it has been a great success. Wild Spellcraft has sold more copies than I imagined it would, and the reviews have (so far) all been positive. I think that congratulations are in order for Ryan 'RangerWickett' Nock, frequent contributor to this e-zine and author of Wild Spellcraft.

This project was an experiment, and the success or failure of Wild Spellcraft was the barometer by which I measured the potential of a community publishing company. The whole idea of the company is not to make a large profit (it never will), but to help aspiring artists and authors in the EN World community to get a foot through the door of the publishing industry. Something to put on their resume, or simply something that allows them to say "Hey! Look what I did!". In that regard, this experiment has proved that such a venture is viable, and I am pleased to say that I can confidently predict that more EN World members will see their names in print in the future.

Of course, those who have been following the Natural 20 Press announcements will be aware that Mystic Eye Games have entered into a partnership with us to bring these electronic .pdfs to print. This is the perfect deal for Natural 20 Press - now community members' work has an avenue by which it can actually end up on the shelf in a hobby store. The only problem is that I'll never be able to offer this chance to as many people as I would like - but even if I get a small handful of people into print, I will be happy with the venture.

I'm taking advantage of the setup myself. I am currently in the throes (and I mean that quite literally) of penning d20 Supers supplement. I have artist waiting to illustrate it, and graphic designers waiting to design the final product. Harold Nichols, my co-writer, is busy writing sections on superhero backgrounds and the origins of their powers, while I myself battle with the complexities of creating a viable system on which to hang all this while keeping it all within the boundaries of a useful d20 system product. Not the easiest task I've ever attempted.

Difficulties appear at every step in the process. How do I keep this balanced? How do I avoid violating d20 license restrictions on creating rules for character advancement? How do I deal with the issues of equipment and gadgets in a 'generic' ruleset? I have managed to overcome each problem as it arises, and, hopefully, the final result will be a decent set of superhero rules for the d20 system.

One of the 'innovations' I'm proud of is the way I handled equipment. This probably isn't to everybody's tastes, but I think that it's the best way to do it without falsely advertising the product as a 'generic' ruleset. Essentially, I have not distinguished between superpowers and items of equipment. The 'Superfeat' which allows you to fly can be described as a natural ability, as a rocket-pack or as wings - the rules are the same whatever you do. Invulnerability can come from a superhumanly tough skin, a suit of power armour or a special costume. You describe it however you like. Some items even combine two or more Superfeats - a suit of armour that lets you fly, protects you from damage and allows you to shoot laser blasts from a wrist mounted blaster is no more than a combination of the Flight, Toughness and Energy Blast Superfeats. In this way, you can customise equipment to your heart's content, and ensure that

everything matches the genre or time period in which you choose to play.

Anyway - enough about me! On with the magazine! ♦

Contents

- 2 Editorial
- 3 Product Reviews
- 16 Crescent Island Spellcaster
- 21 Shieldmaiden
- 24 Back in the Academy...
- 31 Creature: Bonesucker
- 32 Creature: T'Shann
- 34 A Murder of Ravens
- 38 Credits
- 38 Open Gaming License

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All the text from the articles:

- Crescent Island Spellcaster
- Shieldmaiden
- Back in the Academy....
- Creature: Bonesucker
- Creature: T'Shann
- A Murder of Ravens.

D20 Reviews

By Alan D. Kohler

Magic of Rokugan

AEG

www.alderac.com

\$24.95

★★★★☆

After the excellent showing of AEG's D20 version of their Legend of the Five Rings (L5R) setting with the Rokugan book, and a good follow-up with *Creatures of Rokugan*, one was given to wonder if they could keep it up. To answer that question, AEG comes out with their third d20 system L5R book, *Magic of Rokugan*.

Magic of Rokugan is an sourcebook of magic in the Rokugan setting. This book is primarily for players of shugenja, the chief magic-using class of Rokugan. However, there are a number of magic items and other rules that concern a more general audience, such as advanced rules for ancestral daisho.

A First Look

Magic of Rokugan is a perfect-bound softcover book. The book is somewhat thick, but a quick look inside reveals it to only have 96 pages; as with *Creatures of Rokugan*, *Magic of Rokugan* is printed on a heavy paper stock. The book is priced at \$24.95. On a price-per-page basis, that is rather expensive for a book of this size. This may spring, in part, for license fees that they must pay to freely use *Wizards of the Coast's* Oriental Adventures material and logos, but that will come as cold comfort to the consumer who has to pony up the dough.

The book has a color cover with graphics that make it resemble rice paper bound with a blue binding, similar to *Rokugan* and *Creatures of Rokugan*. The front cover has a nice picture of a man in orange robes (probably a Phoenix shugenja) casting some sort of fire spell.

The interior uses a small typeface and leader space and the layout is pleasant. The art is fairly decent, though nothing

drew my attention the way that prior Rokugan D20 books did. Most of the illustrations are small, and representative of specific character classes, items, or spells in the book.

Though the production values on the book are high, so is the price. The book is \$5.00 more than a *Wizards of the Coast* book with the same page count.

A Deeper Look

Magic of Rokugan is arranged into an introduction and five chapters. The introduction has an introductory short story and a short snippet on how to use the book.

Chapter 1: Religion and Magic

Chapter one is something of a miscellany. It contains most of the background text in the book. It touches on topics such as the two major religions in Rokugan, becoming a shugenja and likely roles of Shugenja (including the rare multi-classed Shugenja) in Rokugani society, guidelines for creating new Shugenja spells, and the nature of the Kami.

The chapter ends with a few mechanical bits. It introduces a new knowledge skill, knowledge (ghosts). If you took a gander at *Creatures of Rokugan*, you should understand that this skill could prove very useful. It is basically the equivalent of the knowledge (undead) skill in the standard D&D game.

The last page of the chapter is a small selection of new feats:

Spirited Performance allows and artisan to make a performance to entrance the kami, providing a bonus to allied shugenja.

Greater Daisho (which comes in 4 levels) extends the Ancestral Daisho class ability to allow the samurai to add intelli-

gence and special purpose powers to his ancestral blades.

Pure Kitsu Blood is a lion feat that allows you to learn any ancestor spell in place of your regular spells.

Tao Mastery grants a character with a high void point total a number of minor spell-like abilities.

Travel magic is a unicorn secret lore feat that allows the character to double the range and weight allowance on any spell with the teleportation descriptor.

Chapter 2: Prestige Classes

The second chapter introduces a number of new magic-oriented prestige classes for the setting. As with the Rokugan book, each class has a short list of sample characters in the Legend of the Five Rings setting.

The jade magistrates are an order of military Shugenja that serve the jade champion, the leader of the imperial military. Jade magistrates are specialized in fighting corruption within the empire. The jade magistrate gains abilities that improve their perception as well as enhance their damage dealing spells. The class seems modestly powerful to me, and might have been better balanced if you took a level or two out of its spellcasting advancement.

A master smith is not necessarily a spellcaster at all, but rather a legendary smith who can create items with magical power without the aid of magic. I like this concept so much that I am sorely tempted to use it in a standard campaign. Unfortunately, there seems to be a few editorial glitches in the class writeup. The first and second level class abilities have different names but the exact same description; apparently the author had intended the second level ability to be an improved version of the first level ability, but forgot to edit it. Also, the name of the 10th level class ability is reawaken the blade, but there is no description of this ability; the class



abilities description describes a true master ability at 10th level.

The rebai (or medium) are women who act as envoys to the spirit world, such as the ronin shugenja of the Fortune's Grace order. The medium has impugned spellcasting advancement, plus abilities that allow them to sense, interact with, and protect against spirits.

Yorei-ryoushi (or phantom hunters) are samurai dedicated to dealing with the threat of spirit beings that have entered the mortal realm. Phantom hunters gain a variety of abilities to deal with such creatures. The most central such ability is the disrupt essence ability, which provides a competence bonus equal to half of the phantom hunter's class level against creatures with the spirit subtype.

Chapter 3: Spells

The third (and largest) chapter deals entirely with Shugenja spells. I was a little disappointed to see that there were no maho spells here; that's the fun stuff as far as GMs are concerned! However, that might make the book a bit more player-friendly.

There is a complete list of spells available to the Shugenja, including the spells in this book and previous D20 L5R/OA books. It does not include the previous spell schools, but it does introduce three new spell schools: the Moshi school of the Mantis clan, the Kitsune school of the Fox clan, and the Tonbo school of the Dragon clan.

The new spells are largely drawn from the history of Rokugan. For example, the spell Devastation of Stone is the spell that was used to destroy the armies of the spirit emperor Hantei XVI.

One of the more interesting chains of spells is Importune Kami I-IX. Basically, the spell can be used to bargain with an elemental spirit to bring forth any spell of the same level of the Shugenja's choice. However, the spell costs XP and the Kami demands a service in exchange. If the Shugenja agrees to the service and then

fails, they are stripped of spellcasting of that element for a week. This acts as a miniature wish spell. The cost is steep, but it can help add to a Shugenja's flexibility.

There are some spells that would be interesting additions to any D&D campaign. For example, kingdom beneath the sea is a group teleport that works by allowing the recipients to enter the water in one point and emerge anywhere else along the coast.

However, many of the spells are appropriate primarily to an Oriental Adventures game, or in some cases are unique to the assumptions of Rokugan. Many spells reference void points, a purely Rokugan mechanic. For example, spiritual presence boosts an ability score by a number equal to your maximum void points. Some spells reference honor, and as such should be usable in a general OA campaign, though not in a regular D&D campaign without some adjustments.

Chapter 4: Magic Items

Unlike the previous chapter, chapter 4 is not merely a laundry list. It does introduce a number of magic items unique to Rokugan. However, it also introduces a few new concepts for handling magic items in Rokugan.

The first and perhaps most interesting such item is the concept of nemuranai. As you may well know, the typical D&D paradigm of acquiring magic items from the fallen is at odds with the ethos of the upper classes of Rokugan (who are the most likely player characters.)

In Rokugan, there are considered to be spirits in many things. Nemuranai are spirits that become awakened by their association with powerful individuals. In doing so, they essentially become spontaneously enchanted magic items with rudimentary intelligence. Nemuranai may be granted to a PC by the GM if that PC does not have the amount of magic prescribed by the normal rules for the character's level. Nemuranai almost never operate when looted. They

sometimes will operate if given as a gift, but generally only for a character with a similar outlook (alignment and honor.)

New rules are provided for ancestral daisho. Most of these rules are recommendations for handling situations like bonding to a new set of daisho if you do not have one, removing capabilities from daisho, or using the ancestral daisho ability on weapons already enchanted by the normal means.

The chapter introduces two new special materials: Rokugani steel and night crystal. Rokugani steel is somewhat like adamantine in that it provides a means for non-spellcasters to make weapons and armor with enhancement bonuses, though Rokugani steel provides a bonus up to +4. Night crystal is a material used by unicorn shugenja; items made with night crystal receive a bonus to ranges, saving throw DCs, skill check bonuses, charges, and uses, making it very useful in item enchantment.

Finally are the new magic items. Along with them comes a new random items table. The table refers you to the table in the Oriental Adventures book for most rolls, though 15% of random items will be taken from this book.

A single new armor item is introduced, Takao's Jingasa. This item provides an armor bonus and resistance bonus to will saves, as well as free use of the void use feat (or two extra void points if the character already has void use.)

A number of new magic weapon properties and specific weapons are introduced. New Rokugan-specific text is provided for the dishonorable and honorable weapon abilities originally detailed in Oriental Adventures. New abilities include bloodthirsty (inflicts a negative level on a successful hit), slayer (doubles sneak attack damage), void and void burst (inflict extra non-elemental void damage). There are many specific weapons, including items such as Anekkusai's Feathers (appear as feathers, but upon speaking a command word become +2 arrows that return to

the owner 2 rounds), blood arrows of Yajinden (tainted arrows that strike as touch attacks), the dragon's claw katana (a +2 katana that gives the wielder a pool of extra void points), as well as several unique weapons of the various clans.

A few new potions are introduced, most of them brother of [element] potions. Each potion grant spell resistance against spells of the named elements.

A new type of item is introduced, the imperial writ. Imperial writs are items created by the power of the emperor; shugenja prepare them much as scrolls with a reduced cost, and then the emperor seals the writ with his own hand.

Naga pearls are another new type of item, unique to nagas of Rokugan, and allows a caster to expend their spell repertoire; by meditating while holding the naga pearl, the shugenja may cast the encoded spell as if they knew it with a spellcraft check. The pearls also may be crushed to activate a second power.

The chapter introduces a variety of new wondrous items and artifacts from the Rokugan setting. Examples of the former are bronze lanterns (which act as one-use items that may summon a monster), dragon helms (a variety exist, each has a different defensive ability and enhances a different ability score or set of scores), and the silk and steel kimono (a kimono which grants armor bonuses but does incur any sort of armor check penalty or arcane spell failure chance.) Examples of the later include the mantle of the jade champion (has defensive abilities, plus boosts the users spell DC against creatures with shadowlands taint), the bloodswords (a set of bloodthirsty katanas, each with its own additional traits and some sort of compulsion that is inflicted upon the wielder in a certain trigger condition) and the twelve black scrolls which contain the essence of the wicked kami Fu Leng.

Chapter 5: Magic of the Clans

The fifth and final chapter is entitled Magic of the Clans. This section is mostly exposition, with a few details and tweaks for magic by each clan. For the most part, the section describes the character and organization of the spellcasters of each clan as well as that of bloodspeakers, ronin, and the Kolat.

Conclusion

As already mentioned, the book does come at a fairly high price point per page. However, AEG is keeping their production values very high, and overall, the ideas and mechanical implementation is fairly good. This should be a valuable resource for GMs or Shugenja character in a D20 Rokugan game. The spells are probably not as portable to other settings as prior Rokugan products have been owing to the common reference to void mechanics, but many of the magic items could be useful in other settings. I am especially fond of the idea of using Nemuranai in other settings.

Arcana: Societies of Magic

Green Ronin Publishing

www.greenronin.com

\$14.95

★★★★☆

Arcana: Societies of Magic is a d20 system sourcebook by Green Ronin Publishing, the publishers of the much lauded Legions of Hell. Arcana: Societies of Magic describes 6 organizations with unique goals, and unique styles of magic to achieve those goals.

A First Look

Arcana: Societies of Magic is 64 page perfect-bound softcover book priced at \$14.95. This is a fairly typical price for a book of this size.

The cover is blue, with a darker hue near the bottom of the book, fading to white at the top. The front cover picture is by

Jason Engle (whose work you may recognize from the pages of Dungeon magazine), depicting some manner of spellcaster in front of a brazier, with one hand surrounded by purple glowing motes and the other grasping a staff. (This just happens to be the same picture I use for my avatar on the Realms of Evil boards.)

The interior is black and white. The interior illustrations are of average quality; none struck me as being especially good or bad, with one exception. There is one picture of a gnome wizard that looked like a characture, entirely out of place for a serious product. There are a few maps, and the cartography is excellent; the maps are clear, attractive, and functional. The layout is also attractive and functional.

The typeface is of moderate size, the margins about average in size. Combined with the price per page, I would say that this product delivers an average value based on quantity of content alone.

A Deeper Look

(Warning: There are many secrets to these societies that could be considered spoilers in a game using them.)



Arcana: Societies of Magic is organized into six sections, one for each of the included societies. The sections have a similar layout. Rules material like prestige classes, spells, feats, and magic items (but not stat blocks) are offset in grey sidebars. Each society is broken down into at least three section, one entitled inside the [society], one describing personalities of the society, plus a campaigning section describing how the use the society in your particular campaign. Three of the societies also

include a sample locale used by the society, complete with a map.

The Inside the [Society] sections vary in structure, but each basically outlines the nature of the society, including goals, modes of operation, and what life is like inside the society. The Personalities section has statistic blocks and descriptions for a few of the figures within each society, though not always the highest level figures. The Campaigning section includes some suggestions on what role the society might play in your campaign, and a few alternative "truths" that you can use to alter the basic concept of the society (which I thought was a rather useful feature.)

The Abbey of Green Steel

The first society presented is the Abbey of Green Steel. The abbey is a martial monastic order with the ultimate goal of transforming its members into devils. Though they have no overt plans for world domination or somesuch, my impression is that this cannot be good. The new rules devised for the Abbey of the Green Steel are probably the most clever in the book. First is a monkish prestige class (with arcane spellcasting ability) that allows the character to combine arcane spells with unarmed attacks.

The more interesting mechanical bit introduced by the Abbey of Green Steel is the mechanics for outsider weapons. This concept is similar to that of binding demons to items as described in *Dragonlords of Melniboné* and *Demonology: The Dark Road*. However, unlike those two books, the outsider weapon rules work well in conjunction with the existing rules. The cost of creating such weapons is similar to standard magic weapons with the same capabilities, but reduced by a time depending on the specified time of the binding. The item requires spells to summon and bind the creature into the weapon (such as the planar binding spells) but can have abilities depending on the creature's abilities.

The campaigning section paints the green steel monks as a secret evil that strikes from their hidden base. The scenario's section includes scenarios that cast them as hidden partners in a rebellion, or as a force that the players may have to parley with to defeat another fiendish foe.

The Dragon Gang

The second group is the Dragon Gang. The dragon gang is essentially a somewhat racist criminal gang; the race that they favor is Drakeling. Drakeling is a new race introduced in the book. They are descendants of dragon cross-breeds, but not so close to dragons that they qualify as half-dragons.

The other major mechanical item that the chapter adds is a set of rules for drugs. Drugs are very much like poisons in that they have both a primary and secondary effects. Further, the duration between the primary and secondary effects varies. However, the primary effect is not necessarily detrimental... but the secondary effect is. There is also another save for addiction, and some simple rules for handling addiction.

The central personality in the dragon gang is somewhat impressive. There is a reason that there are so many members of the gang with dragon blood – the gang is headed by a dragon. The campaigning suggestions present some ways to exploit this fact in interesting ways, theorizing on why a dragon would engage in such an endeavor and deriving some interesting scenarios from it, such as the possibility that the dragon is only in it to attract a mate, or to reshape human society.

Servants of Decay

The third society is the Servants of Decay. The Servants of Decay believe that the universe once existed in a much simpler, chaotic state, and the current reality is only transitory. In these times dwelled creatures called preternaturals, that did not care for the trappings of society but strived for greater things. As such, they

believe that the proper course of action is to act to break down societies and help return the world to the simpler primal chaotic state. There is a preternatural state that still exists in a parallel plane that is something of a warped reflection of the physical world.

The mechanics introduced in the section include a new prestige class (the servant of decay), the preternatural template, and rules for handling the effects of society against the magic of the servants of decay. The servant of decay is a divine spellcaster who gains the ability to travel in the preternatural world safely, and eventually allow others to do so. Eventually the servant of decay becomes a preternatural creature, becoming an outsider and gaining damage reduction and cold resistance.

The preternatural creature template is the represent creatures of the preternatural world. They are incorporeal outsiders with many defensive qualities.

There was one aspect of the Servants of Decay section that I didn't care for. It makes intimations that a DM should treat them as having no alignment. I found that rather silly. If the DM uses alignment, they are not likely to discard the moral realist system for the convenience of on group; if they don't use alignment, it isn't an issue in the first place.

Temple of the Living God

The central concept behind the temple of the living god is that there was once a deity named Viraxis whose portfolio was mysteries and secrets. He was once very powerful, appealed to by nations to hide their secrets, and by arcane spellcasters to reveal arcane secrets. However, the followers of Viraxis began to rely on their own devices and turned away from the deity. Eventually Viraxis fell from his divine position. Before fading entirely away, Viraxis invested his last bit of divine power in his last high priest. He now strives to regain his power as a deity, and the temple is the last vestige of his worshippers.

The Temple of the Living God section include a new template, a new feat, and a new domain. The new template is divine avatar, which in this section is applied to the priest who holds the last splinter of Viraxis' power, but could be used for anyone in a similar situation. The new feat is secret of spellcraft, which grants a bonus when researching spells. The new domain is secrets, which was the chief area of interest of Viraxis.

Tribunal of Arcane Justice

The Tribunal of Arcane Justice is a body that exists to enforce its own set of laws regarding the use of magic. The Tribunal does not worry much about petty crimes using magic such as charming a peasant or murdering a rival using magic. Their concern is the use of magic in wantonly hazardous or destructive fashions, such as opening permanent gates to the infernal realms and using magic to enslave others.

The Tribunal is housed in a citadel whose location is not specified in the book (it is left up to the GM), but is not accessible by normal means. For example, it may exist on a demiplane or an isolated cavern.

The Tribunal sends out agents to enforce its agenda. This brings about the presented prestige class, the wizard slayer. They are fighting type characters with class abilities that focus on detecting magic as well as attacking and defending against arcane spellcasters.

The School Beyond the Veil

The last society is called the School Beyond the Veil. It is a martial school that appeals to warrior types across the land. They teach fighting styles that make use of divination magic to enhance their capabilities.

The School Beyond the Veil features a few fighting styles very close in concept to Oriental Adventures, i.e., they grant a special ability once you have obtained the requisite feats.

The epitome of the school's fighting training is the moon wraith adept prestige class. This is a class with good fighting abilities as well as its own spell list and advancement. The spells available to it include effects that aid in detection, evasion of detection, and combat.

There is a dark secret to the school, though. Though they recruit fighting men far and wide, they are actually agents of a conspiracy. They have a secret agenda revolving around dominating the world and reshaping society into a rigid hierarchy. Initiates of the highest circle are doomed to become a new type of undead called moon wraiths.

Conclusion

When I first heard about this book, I assumed that it was a book with detailed backgrounds of arcane orders and prestige classes to go with them, something like a subset of Tome & Blood. The book is actually a bit more like Atlas Games' Touched by the Gods, which features a variety of secret societies to add to your game.

That said, I think in a lot of ways Arcana: Societies of Magic outclasses Touched by the Gods. The societies in Arcana: Societies of Magic fewer and better developed, and more consistent in scope. Additionally, it has much better supporting rules material and the alternative takes make it much easier to fit these societies into a game. Some of the mechanics, like outsider weapons, beg to be used even outside of the context that they are presented in.

Inns & Taverns

By Brian K. Moseley
Darkfuries
\$5.00



Inns & Taverns is a software download product from Darkfuries available at RPGnow (www.rpgnow.com.) It provides a variety of tavern and inn floorplans

for use in fantasy games. The download is priced at \$5.00 US.

The product comes packaged as a zip file. When unpacked, the product consists of a number of html files that the user may navigate with a standard browser, and a subdirectory with the gif file maps.

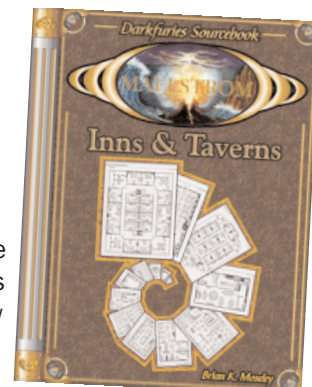
When opened, the content.html file has two frames. The left side frame provides navigation between the different galleries and each individual tavern and inn floor. The right hand frame is where the content appears when selected. Of course, you can use your own graphics viewer to browse the images directory.

In addition to the title page and introductory information, there is a thumbnail gallery page for the inns and one for the taverns. Finally, there is a legend page that describes all of the individual icons used on the maps.

There are a total of 20 inns and 15 taverns. Each building has between one and four floors, including cellar and dungeon levels. Each floor is an individual gif file.

The floorplans themselves are laid out with a dotted-line square grid, with each square 5' on a side (perfect for d20 system players). The icons are generally clear and the layout logical; the floorplans should fit nicely into a standard fantasy campaign. When printed on a standard 8 1/2 x 11 sheet, the map grid is scaled such that it works well with standard 25mm miniatures.

My only complaint is that in the few cases where secret doors are used, they are listed on the map. It would be nice if those maps that use secret doors had a player and a GM version, so the GM doesn't give away the secret



doors buy using miniatures on a printout of the map.

Conclusion

Inns & Taverns floorplans does exactly what it sets out to do: provides the GM with a variety of prepackaged floorplans for use in the game. The presentation is excellent and the html layout very convenient. Other than having two maps in those cases where secret doors are used, I think it would be interesting to see a product like this with descriptions of tavern staff and visitors, possibly even complete with d20 system stats. That would truly give a GM everything they need to run tavern encounters. However, for what you are provided with, five dollars is a bargain. There are just enough of each type of map that you never have to re-use a map.

Twilight of Atlantis

Avalanche Press

www.avalancheexpress.com

\$12.95

★★★★☆

Avalanche Press LTD is known primarily for their historical wargames. They hoped to leverage their historical emphasis with d20 system products by offering products that were oriented around historical and mythological themes. However, many have come to associate them with the covers that they have chosen to apply to most of their d20 system books; most of their d20 system product covers feature a scantily clad woman with details that are often entirely wrong for the setting that the book treated. This has earned Avalanche no small degree of criticism.

However, I must say that at least one author in Avalanche has earned my respect. Despite being held back by a somewhat costly cover price, weak presentation, and gratuitously cheesecake cover, I found Jade & Steel (authored by Jim Lai) to have some very strong content. It had very good background material, good rules material, and one of

the better event driven adventures I have seen in a d20 system product. I saw Jade & Steel as something of a diamond in the rough.

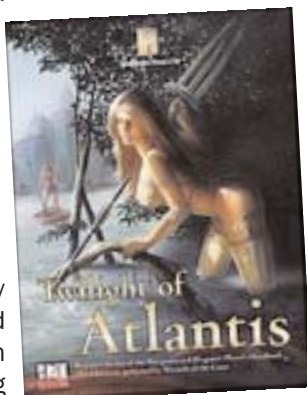
I was a fan of the old Bard Games Atlantis setting (written by Talislanta creator Stephan Michael Sechi) in my gaming youth, which was based largely around myths of Atlantis and similar myths of prehistoric civilization. So, when I got a chance to see another effort by an author demonstrated some talent about a topic I found interesting, I jumped at the chance.

A First Look

Twilight of Atlantis is a 48-page staple-bound softcover book priced at \$12.95 US. This gives it a

rather high cost per page, similar to other Avalanche d20 books.

The cover of Twilight of Atlantis, as with many of its d20 system books, is illustrated by Heavy Metal



artist Lorenzo

Sperlonga, a fact that Avalanche likes to point out often. And as with other such covers, it depicts a chesty woman in skimpy attire. In this case, the woman seems to be wearing a bronze chainmail bikini and matching bronze chainmail stockings. She is holding a trident and has some vegetation and an exotic looking structure in the backdrop.

The interior is black-and-white. The interior artwork is a mediocre quality, and a few snapshots of ancient artifacts are thrown in here and there. There is a two-page map of the Atlantean world in the back, but it is rather abstract and unappealing. Overall, the interior looks rather bland.

The typeface used in the book is somewhat large with the exception of the

content of numerous sidebars, which seem to use a denser typeface. The book does use slender margins, which should deliver more content. There are some column formatting problems in some of the sidebars; this makes some of the stat blocks difficult to read.

Like many other Avalanche Press D20 books, the sparse content for the price and weak presentation are detractors to the delivered value of the product.

A Deeper Look

Twilight of Atlantis is organized into three parts: Atlantis and the Ancient World, Characters and Equipment, and Atlantean Campaign.

Part I: Atlantis and the Ancient World, describes the background, history, geography, and society of Atlantis and other European and African nations at the time of the purported existence of Atlantis. For the most part, the authors build off of Plato's description of Atlantis and some suppositions other have made about his tale (e.g., it is assumed that Plato got the idea from Atlantis from Egyptian folklore; there are many Egyptian references in the book) but extrapolates a bit to make it into a fantasy setting.

For those not familiar with the legend of Atlantis, the basic concept is this: The Greek god Poseiden raised a land from the depths of the ocean. He takes a mortal wife Cleito and by her she had 10 children, 5 sets of twins. His progeny multiplied and expanded to overtake the continent. They eventually forge a prosperous and powerful empire that extended into Europe and Africa. However, the Athenians were eventually able to throw repel Atlantean invaders, and the Greek gods eventually grew jealous and/or worried about the Atlanteans and sank the continent.

As with Plato's version, Twilight of Atlantis pictures a landscape with ring-shaped canals. However, the end of Atlantis in this version is not due to the Greek gods, but Poseiden himself.

Amidst a war in which a number of nations under Atlantis' dominion rose up in rebellion, a quarrel arose between Poseiden's wife Cleito and Gaderius, one of his sons. Gaderius slew Cleito with Poseiden's trident, the very artifact that was responsible for keeping Atlantis above the waves. In his rage, Poseiden breaks the trident, dooming Atlantis.

The version of Atlantis and the ancient world is one befitting the sorts of ancient myths that were the source of inspiration for the fantasy genre. Accordingly, there are wizards of great power in the ancient world, and the Atlanteans are foremost among them. The first part details the rise and fall of Atlantis as well as cultural details such as the Atlantean worldview, views and death, agriculture, art, magic, and so forth. Atlantis is depicted as an empire built on magic, a vision that is consistent with many visions that have grown up around Plato's image of Atlantis.

In addition to the main text, there are a number of other details about the ancient world surrounding Atlantis, detailed in sidebars. This includes a detailing of Egypt, as well as the Lemurians and Mue, dwellers in other fabled lands.

Part 2 launches into the details you need to make player characters in the Twilight of Atlantis setting. There are five races available for PCs in the setting. Humans use the normal d20 system rules. The four remaining races are new: Atlanteans, Noble Atlanteans, Half-Atlanteans, and Bastai.

Common Atlanteans are pictured as intellectually powerful but physically frail. Spinning off of the theme that the empire is built around magic, Atlanteans can detect magic and always treat use magic device and knowledge (arcana) as class skills.

Noble Atlanteans are closer to the true bloodline of Poseiden. They are tougher and more charismatic than common Atlanteans, and have bonuses to several skills and all saving throws, as well as

acid, cold, and electricity resistance. The note on Atlanteans states that they add one to their class levels due to the benefits that it provides, which would be normal for a powerful race. However, it also states that they get an additional hit dice for this one level, which is not the way that races with level modifiers are normally handled. A final glitch is that (according to the author), the noble Atlantean description is supposed to be applied to the common Atlantean stats as a template, but this is not stated anywhere.

Half-Atlanteans are merely crossbreeds between humans and Atlanteans. This is handled in much the same way half-elves are handled in the d20 system rules. Half-Atlanteans have Atlantean racial traits at a reduced level, but have human flexibility with classes.

The Bastai are a race of evolved cats that the Atlanteans magically engineered for use against the Egyptians. Bastai are given penalties to constitution and intelligence, but bonuses to their dexterity and wisdom. Bastai have bonuses to a variety of motion-related skills. They are experts at unarmed combat, and thus have monk as a favored class.

Twilight of Atlantis presents four new prestige classes for Atlantean characters: Artificer, Orphean, Resonant, and Spellbane.

The Artificer is a spellcaster who specializes in the creation of magic items. They receive numerous bonus item creation feats, and some useful class abilities, such as the ability to use the recipient's XP towards item creation. They amount of item creation feats they get seems gross, but considering how specialized they are and the inherent limits on magic items, I don't think it would work out badly.

Orpheans are loosely based on the legend of Orpheus, who traveled to Hades to recover his beloved Euridice. Orpheans are magically sustained warriors who have returned from death. The magic that sustains them gives them

great resilience, including natural armor bonuses and resistance to critical hits.

The Resonant appears to be an outgrowth of the idea as "magic as a science" that has been touched on in the authors' description of Atlantis. The resonant's key class ability is the ability to create prisms that let them use metamagic more effectively. While this is a novel idea, I am not so sure I like the execution. The metaprisms are created like a one-shot magic item with a spell level equal to the total adjustment of the metamagic feat to the level of the spell. This seriously underestimates the power of the prism; other items in WotC books suggest that the cost should be based on the total level of the spell after adjustment.

Spellbane is probably the shakiest concept of the lot. They are basically warriors who have learned martial techniques that allow them to fight spellcasters, which sounds like a decent enough concept, and the class abilities seem fairly well thought out as well. What struck me was the available races: Bastai and Half-Atlantean. I can get the Bastai part if they were specifically trained in overcoming Egyptian sorcerers. But I totally don't get why Half-Atlanteans would be included in the races for this class.

Twilight of Atlantis introduces one new skill and several new feats. The new skill is charioteering. As should be apparent, this skill allows the character to maneuver chariots.

The new feats include a few combat oriented ones appropriate to the period, but most are targeted at achieving the "magic as a part of the culture" thing that the authors are driving at. Example are imbue tattoos (which creates magic tattoos), elemental independence (metamagic feat that lets the caster cast an attack spell as raw magical energy vice an elemental effect), and resonant spellcasting (once per day allows the caster to try to cast a spell without using a slot.)

The equipment section provides rules for handling weapons and items in the classical era represented by the book. This includes statistics for the trident and establishes weapon equivalents for the falcata, kopesh, and pike. A short list is also provided detailing which items from the d20 system rules are not available in the era.

Rules are provided for bronze weapons and armor. The combat statistics of bronze items aren't impugned as in many D&D/d20 books covering such items. However, the item's resilience to damage is reduced.

New items and spells are also introduced. In addition to cat's eye bracelets (which assist in unarmed combat) and the already mentioned metaprisms, the magic metal Orichalcum is introduced. For the purposes of item creation, Orichalcum is effectively a universal power component per the DMG.

The new spells are largely themed around the notion of Atlantean's civilized magic and other themes associated with the legends and purported period associated with Atlantis. Chariot of Poseiden creates a chariot that rises out of the waves. Curse of Helios amplifies light causing a fireball like effect that can also blind targets (though considering the usefulness of blinding opponents, the spells level – 3rd – is probably too low.)

The final section, Atlantean Campaigns, includes ideas and guidelines for running a game set in the Atlantean era. This includes some notes on party makeup, types of adventures, and placing monsters according to their cultural origin. The chapter also includes three rather detailed and interesting adventure outlines – really more adventure outlines – for running a game in the Atlantean era.

Conclusion

As was the case with Jade & Steel, Twilight of Atlantis is an assembly of

good ideas and material hampered by the price and presentation. I think that a game set in Atlantis could be a wonderful break from the normal fantasy game, yet it relies strongly enough on existing myths and legends that most players will not be baffled by the alienness of the world. Still, though I find the concepts interesting, I didn't think this book was quite as mechanically as sound as Jade & Steel was.

Seafarer's Handbook

Fantasy Flight Games

www.fantasyflightgames.com

\$24.95

★★★★☆

The Seafarer's Handbook, the third hardbound rulebook in Fantasy Flight Games' Legends & Lairs series, is a nautical rulebook for the d20 system. This is not a lonely position, as Mongoose Publishing has already released their Seas of Blood, and other companies have such products in the pipeline. So of course, the intrepid reader would like to know how it stacks up, right?

Read on.

A First Look

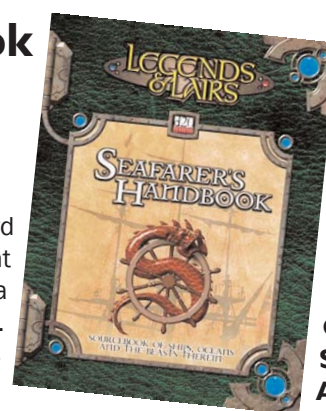
The Seafarer's Handbook is a 176-page hardcover book with a price of \$24.95. This is actually a fairly good price/page ratio for a product of this size.

The cover is mostly a deep green, and has the "metal bound tome" look commonly used by FFG and modestly reminiscent of the D&D 3e core rulebooks. The front cover has a logo of a sea serpent coiled around a ship's helm wheel, against the backdrop of several sketches of ships and ocean maps on a yellow "parchment" color background.

The interior is black and white. As is usually the case with FFG d20 system products, the layout is attractive and easy to read. The interior artwork is good, even better than prior Legends & Lairs books. The most eye catching

talent seems to be Andy Brase, whose work was also featured prominently in FFG's Dragonstar Starfarer's Handbook.

The typeface is small and there is less promotional material than prior FFG Legends & Lairs books, but it has a visibly large column spacing, which will cut down on the word count in the book. However, considering the books price, you are receiving a fairly good quantitative value.



A Deeper Look

The Seafarer's Handbooks is organized into six broad chapters.

Chapter One: Seafaring Adventurers

The first chapter is devoted to characters, including races, classes, feats, skills, equipment, and skills. Basically, chapter one covers the type of material that you would find in the D&D 3e Player's Handbook.

The chapter begins by introducing three new races that make their home among the waves: merfolk, half-merrow, and aquatic elves. Merrow, you should recall, are the aquatic equivalent of Ogres. Half-merrow are merrow/merfolk cross breeds. The race statistics look fairly balanced, but some GMs may take umbrage with the large strength bonus the half-merrow has. Further, the half-merrow has a special racial ability that allows it to use its strength modifier for intimidate checks. As the DMG already provides the impetus for using alternate ability scores for skills if the situation warrants, that didn't seem like much of a racial ability to me.

Each of the races have some subraces mentioned, though there are few variations in the mechanics for the races. However, one prestige class is provided for the coral elf variety of the

aquatic elf, the reef warrior. The reef warrior enters into a symbiotic relationship with life forms that exist in the coral reef, and eventually learn to merge with it.

There is a short section describing adjustments of existing feats and skills when dealing with an underwater environment. This also introduces a variant version of an existing skill, aquatic alchemy. This is due to the fact that normal alchemical methods wouldn't work underwater. Normally, I disdain the creation of new skills. However, in this case, the new skill seems justified, and easy enough to integrate to the existing classes: you merely allow it as an alternative to alchemy.

The book introduces a variety of new feats. Most of the feats fall into two categories: feats appropriate to seafarers (to include a few feats oriented towards a swashbuckling style of combat) and those appropriate to aquatic races. Examples of the former are barroom brawler (gives better unarmed damage and extra subdual hp), great lungs, parry, and port savvy. Examples of the latter are amphibious endurance (lets aquatic races spend more time out of water), tail slam, and tail walking.

Most of these feats are mechanically suitable, but there are a few curiosities.

Create Manikin is an item creation feat that lets you create an effigy of a person for a cost of 2000 gp times the target's level (plus attendant XP cost.) For this cost, you can cast a spell on the effigy up to 10 times, and it affects the target. This seems a little too convenient to me; this would be the ultimate assassination tool. There needs to be some limit on the spells that you can cast.

Fool's Luck also seems a little too convenient as well. It allows the character to replace one failed roll with a success once per day, merely by offering up an explanation of how the character ended up beating the odds. However, if

you consider it, this allows a character to beat any odds once per day, regardless of the fact that it may be well beyond their ability. This might work if you limit it to applying to rolls that fail by some margin (say 5 or less.)

In the same vein as the half-mew's intimidation racial ability mentioned earlier, the feat lookout seems like it gives you an ability that a character would already have. It allows characters in an elevated position to spot things at a greater distance. This should logically apply to all characters.

The equipment section contains new equipment for aquatic characters as well as for characters visiting an underwater realm, such as aquatic armor and waterproof scrolls.

As with the feats and skills, there is a brief section describing how to adjudicate the casting of spells underwater, and a variety of new spells. A new clerical domain, undersea, is introduced with spells predominantly from the new aquatic-themed spells introduced in the book. The spells include those that help deal with underwater conditions (such as sphere of air, improved water breathing, and underwater sense), assist aquatic creatures (such as air breathing), affect ships (like compass curse, sink, and nautomancy, which lets you imbue a ship with spells), and assist in underwater combat (like aquatic acid fog and ink cloud).

Again, there are a few curiosities. The aquatic form spell seems very convenient at first: it gives a character the aquatic template (described later in the book). However, it is permanent and cannot be dispelled. I thought that was a little excessive. The polymorph other spell (which is a similar level lower) is more flexible in this regard.

Sea hag's visage is a 3rd level spell that gives the character a gaze attack that does 2d6 points of strength damage. This seems a little strong for a third level spell.

In addition to the spells, a number of new magic items are introduced that are useful at or under the sea, or are themed after aquatic creatures.

Finally, the chapter covers combat and maneuvering in an underwater environment, including factors such as vision and modifiers for different types of weapons.

Chapter Two: Seafaring Campaigns

The second chapter includes resources and advice for running adventures involved with the sea.

The first section is entitled Adventure and the Sea. It contains advice for constructing seafaring campaigns, ideas for adventure locales like islands and coasts, details of ships and the people who work on them, and rules guidelines for hazards like weather and icebergs.

The second section is entitled Ports of Call. It leads off with some ideas and advice on detailing a port city, including the nature of trading and politics, and cultures. Finally, ideas and advice are given regarding life in a port city, alongside a sample port city, Kaaluntor. There are no maps of the city, but details are provided for such things as the city's markets, quarters, and so forth. At the end of the chapter, complete stats are provided for a number of sample NPCs from the city.

Chapter Three: Undersea Adventures

As chapter two is much concerned with seafaring adventures and environs, chapter three concerns itself with underwater adventures and environs. It includes some general advice for running such adventures, including playing up the alien aspect of such an environment. Rules related aspects of the environment are also addressed. You will find rules for kelp forests and coral reefs, and ideas for undersea site based adventures like shipwrecks.

After the general advice, a strange example of an undersea campaign environment is presented, the

Underdeep. The Underdeep is an underwater setting that is placed in underground oceans. Many unique sites are presented, along with adventure seeds and a few special rules. For example, a new race is presented: the deep drow. The deep drow are essentially aquatic drow elves. As unusual as the underdeep sounds, it just may be worth a try for those players jaded by classical forays into the underdark.

Finally, the chapter introduces a few new underwater creatures. Of the most use is probably the aquatic creature template. The aquatic creature template is provided simply to adapt standard creatures for underwater use. Also provided are the abyssal shark (a gargantuan shark from oceans in a plane of evil), the coral golem, the drowned dead, and the hippocampus (basically an aquatic horse).

Chapter Four: Ship Construction

Chapter four is actually one of the shorter chapter, and provides a set of rules for creating ships. The ship construction is handled by purchasing various elements of the ship from a set of tables. Much like Mongoose's Seas of Blood (and strangely and unfortunately unlike the Dragonstar Starship system), the categories are used for sizes as for D&D creatures, but the scale is different and specific to ships.

In addition to the basic elements, all ships come with one special quality, but more may be purchased. Special qualities are likened to feats, and provide the ship with some way in which it is exceptional. For example, the ship may be good at ramming, have more hit points, or be resistant to fire.

The last page of the chapter provides some basic material for hiring crew.

The ship system in the Seafarer's Handbook is more formal than that in Seas of Blood, and doesn't invent new systems like hull points to handle ship combat.

Chapter Five: Ship Designs

Chapter five presents a number of sample ships for use in the game. Each ship has statistics as outlined by chapter four, along with deck layouts and detailed descriptions of the ship. The deckplans are nicely illustrated and done from a perspective view. Contrasted with Mongoose's Seas of Blood, the additional detail provided in Seafarer's Handbook is rather nice; Seas of Blood only has deckplans for the weatherdecks and have less detail on each ship. However, a disadvantage of the perspective views is that you cannot make enlarged photocopies of them for use with miniatures like you can with the top-down views Seas of Blood provides.

In addition to classic ship designs like longships, cogs, and traders, there are some rather exotic designs. For example, there is the submersible "Iron Whale", the mind-flayer designed "Deep Crawler", and the mobile arcane sanctuary of the "Wizard's Tower Ship." However, some where a little to strange for me such as the "Sahuagin Corsair" (just why would sahuagin have their own ship design?) and the "Druid Lairship."

Chapter Six: Ship Combat

The last chapter covers the topic of ship combat. It utilizes the groundwork set in chapter four, and like it does not deviate for the existing rules for damaging objects. It has rules for maneuvering ships, taking into account effect of crew manning and experience, fire, and swashbuckling combat.

Whether you prefer this version of the combat system over that in Seas of Blood is largely a matter of taste. Personally, I think I prefer the Seas of Blood ship combat. Though seas of

blood does invent a new damage method, it is more manageable since it tries to abstract away some of the details that the Seafarer's Handbook sweats. Further, the Seas of Blood contains a system for handling mass crew combat that integrates with their ship to ship combat system; the Seafarer's handbook has no equivalent.

Conclusion

The question that is probably on everyone's mind is "should I buy this book or the Seas of Blood book?"

The answer is: that depends. You can really buy both books and the only major overlap would be chapters 4 and 6. Seafarer's Handbook has greater details, especially where underwater adventures are concerned. If you wish to use the underwater environment, or like the more explicit method of ship construction, or need some GM advice and ideas on how to run a game, then Seafarer's Handbook should be considered strongly.

However, as a mechanical book on seafaring, I really have to say that I felt like Seas of Blood was somewhat better rounded and more practical.

Slayer's Guide to Sahuagin

Mongoose Publishing

www.mongoosepublishing.com

\$9.95

★★★★☆

The Slayer's Guide to Sahuagin is the latest in Mongoose's Slayer's Guide series which attempt to give more detailed treatment to a variety of d20 system creatures. Prior titles have addressed hobgoblins, gnolls, centaurs, and amazons. This volume takes a look at the sahuagin, a violent aquatic species.

Those who follow my reviews will recall that I wasn't too kind to earlier titles in



this series. But perhaps it's a good time to see how the series is shaping up.

A First Look

The *Slayer's Guide to Sahuagin* is a 32 page staple-bound softcover book. The book is priced as \$9.95 US. This is somewhat expensive for books of this size.

The cover is done in a similar style to previous books in the series: a color illustration of the creature covered with a stylized gray border. The cover picture depicts two fishlike humanoids (one prominent, one in the background) wielding weapons, swimming in an aquatic environment.

The interior is black and white. The layout is similar to the previous *Slayer's Guides*, with an average size typeface and large header font, but there are fewer section breaks.

The art is a significant improvement over the early *Slayer's Guides*. Chris Quilliams (the standout artist from the earlier *Slayer's Guides*) provides an excellent anatomy illustration in the inside cover. He is joined by a variety of other artists, including the excellent Danillo Moretti, who does much of the interior art. Danillo did much of the work in *Mongoose's Travellers Tales* series. Moretti has a crisp, appealing style much like that of popular CCG artist Quinton Hoover.

A Deeper Look

The *Slayer's Guide to Sahuagin* is divided into a number of categorical sections dealing with physiology, habitat, society, methods of warfare, role-playing, adventure ideas, a sample sahuagin village, and a section full of "stock" sahuagin NPCs. Pretty much the first half of the book is expository in nature. The last half of the book is more mechanical in nature. I found this to be a better balance than previous *Slayer's Guides*.

The section on physiology discusses such things as how a sahuagin swims

and breathes, their languages, their senses, and adaptations. Most of this section is exposition, but there are a few mechanical sidebars that give variants that might arise as consequences of the content of the exposition. For example, there are brief rules of sahuagin smelling blood in the water, and entering a barbarian rage-like state if injured in the water.

The section on habitat briefly discusses the nature of sahuagin settlements. Being social creatures, they coalesce into extended kingdoms. The section also postulates some history of sahuagin as they exist in a fantasy world.

The section on sahuagin society postulates that religion is a central element of their society. The sahuagin religion consists of three primal god-figures, It That Is Eaten, He Who Eats, and She That Teaches. Under sahuagin theology, certain creatures exist to be eaten, and others to eat. When It That Is Eaten was torn asunder when it had conflicting desires about the natural order, land and sky were created. Thus by sahuagin theology, those on dry land defy the natural order as part of the rebellious aspect of It That Is Eaten.

In sahuagin society, females are largely priestesses and males are largely warriors and leaders. As with many evil races, advancement through the ranks occurs largely by combat.

This section introduces a number of new rules items. Straightforward guidelines are provided for adding sahuagin nations to your game. There are domains for the sahuagin deities and two new spells, natural presence (calms prey creatures so they cannot react to the sahuagin until the sahuagin attacks) and threshing (sends stunning waves through the water). There are two new short (5-level) prestige classes, royal guard and high priestess, and two new feats, leaping attack and resist drying.

The *Methods of Warfare* section discusses the combat tactics and methods that the sahuagin use. This

includes the weapons they normally use (such as trident and net) and how different size units act to defeat an enemy. Finally, there are methods for effectively fighting sahuagin; their eyes are poorly adapted to light and they are adversely affected by fresh water.

The *Role-Playing with Sahuagin* is somewhat mislabeled. It does discuss what motivates sahuagin. However, the upshot is that their most important priority is destruction of land life. This explains well their motivations and likely actions, but leaves little room for peaceful interaction with sahuagin. This seems somewhat a shame to me, and very much taking the easy way out. It seems like they could have come up with some small wrinkle in their philosophy that enterprising players could exploit to relate to them with means other than weapons.

The *Scenario Hooks and Ideas*, *Sahuagin Village*, and *Sahuagin Reference List* sections should give GMs the raw material they need to get a campaign against the sahuagin rolling. They provides some adventure ideas to get players involved, a sample sahuagin village, and a number of NPCs for use against the players.

Two specific leaders (the ranger Big-fella-bloody-spear and the priestess Talking-talk-to Gods) are provided in the village section, and NPCs in the reference list section are more general, from a 10th level ranger sahuagin prince, all the way down to lowly sahuagin young. The statistics are generally solid, unlike those in some earlier *Slayer's Guides*. However, I did find some selections unlikely. For example, why would an evil cleric ever prepare an inflict wounds spell when they can use them spontaneously? That is a relatively minor quibble, though.

Conclusion

Overall, I thought this was a much better book than the earlier *Slayer's Guides*. It had a better balance of exposition to

rules, making it a much more practical book, and the production values have improved markedly. The rules material is solid and would be useful in any campaign involving sahuagin.

I was a little disappointed in one aspect. Despite the fact the book gives the reader a little deeper insight into sahuagin, they still cannot effectively be reasoned with and are primarily foes to be met in combat, which makes some of the exposition seem a little wasteful.

That said, I can definitely see a role for this book and other Slayer's Guides the way that they are developing. Often when I buy adventures, I end up deciding that the plot as presented will not work in my game, and I end up gutting it for the usable material (rules, stats, maps, and ideas). This book gives you all of that stuff in raw form, giving you all the material you need to "roll your own" adventure involving sahuagin that fits your own game.

Creatures of Rokugan

AEG

www.alderac.com

\$24.95

★★★★☆

AEG made a splash in adapting their Legend of the Five Rings setting to the D20 system with the Rokugan book, which used the D&D Oriental Adventures book as a jump-off point. Rokugan delivered a level of production values, imagination, and rules implementation unseen by that point in third party D20 system publishers. But while it is obvious that they put a lot of effort into the Rokugan D20 book, one wonders if they can keep it up.

To answer that query we must turn our attention to the latest D20 book for L5R. Creatures of Rokugan expands upon the creatures available in the L5R setting

from those defined in the Oriental Adventures book.

A First Look

Creatures of Rokugan is a perfect-bound softcover book. It has 112 pages and is priced at \$24.95 US. I was surprised when I did a page count as the book feels rather hefty; the book appears to be printed on rather heavy paper.

The book cover has a similar appearance to the Rokugan book, with a beige ricepaper look with symbols of the various L5R clans in the backdrop with a simulated blue binding with a cord along the spine. The front cover depicts a humanoid creature with horns and tusks wielding a sword (a tsuno.)

The interior is black-and-white. The illustrations are mostly pencil drawings, and most of the creatures described herein are provided with an illustration. The illustrations are good to excellent. I found the illustration for the mokumokuren especially interesting.

The text density in the book is fairly high, similar to WotC supplements. The margins are modest, and the outside margin is filled with a shaded bar and a darker bar with the name of the creature on the page for ease of use. The section header and creature names are done in a font that appears like calligraphic characters. The creature descriptions are not arranged one per page, but rather are arranged for maximum density similar to WotC's Monster Manual.

Creatures of Rokugan runs about 22 cents per page, which is a bit high for a book of this size, and similar to the smaller WotC classbooks. However, coupled with the text density and presentation, it delivers a decent value.

A Deeper Look

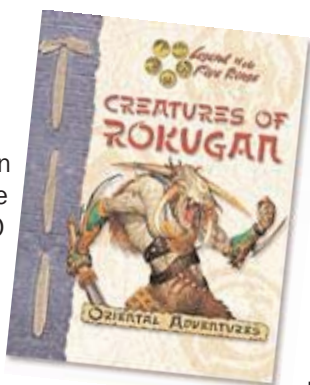
Creatures of Rokugan is sorted into a brief introduction, a sizable main section containing all of the creatures, and three appendices.

The introduction has a short story and a variety of new rules that apply to the creatures described herein. This is primarily concerned with two elements: new (or variant) subtypes that apply to Rokugan, and a variant rules that apply to jade and crystal weapons. In Creatures of Rokugan, incorporeal creatures can be affected normally by jade and crystal weapons, and creatures classified as a spirits are more difficult to affect with enchantment effects except by other spirits. Other new or adapted types are darkness, oni, shadowlands, and void.

The section on jade and crystal weapons introduces a new variant of the damage resistance rule that is used in the book. Creatures can have a damage resistance rating with a crystal or jade descriptor, such as DR 10/+2 (crystal) or DR 10/+2(jade). If a creature has this sort of descriptor, then you count the weapon bonus needed to bypass the DR as two points lower for that type and one point lower for a weapon of the other type. For example, a creature with DR 10/+3 would be affected normally by a standard weapon of +3 or higher bonus, a crystal weapon with a +2 or higher bonus, or a jade weapon with a +1 or higher bonus.

Creatures of Rokugan introduces over 100 new creatures and 7 templates. Given this, there is a great variety of creatures, but there are a few strong themes. There are a great deal of undead, principally restless spirits who are unable to find rest, a great many otherworldly oni and other shadowlands creatures. Enumerating all of these creatures would be beyond the scope of this review, but it may be worth my while to touch on a few:

Ashalan: Not technically from Rokugan, but rather from the lands beyond, Ashalan are immortal humanoid



creatures covered with tattoos. They are commonly sorcerers, and they have the ability to cloak themselves in shadows and dominate those that they tattoo. The ashalan are possible PC material.

Elemental Terrors: Powerful oni that can be summoned - but not controlled - by maho tsukai (blood sorcerers.) There is one greater terror and one lesser terror for each of the five L5R elements. The elemental terrors are tainted elemental creatures that serve dreadful beings that dwell in the shadowlands known as dark oracles.

Gaki are undead creatures, spirits of evil individuals consumed by hunger. Gaki can take the shapes of insects, and appear in a variety of forms. For example skull tide gaki look like swarms of skulls floating on the waves, that make a maddening chattering sound and try to chew through the hull of ships to get to the crew inside.

Guardian Statues are not intentionally created, but are statues given life by the spirits of samurai in order to assist their clan.

Kenku appear to be the Rokugan variant of the tengu from Oriental Adventures. They are crow headed winged creatures, known for their mastery of the katana. For some reason, the Rokugan version is listed as a fey creature (I would have pegged it as a monstrous humanoid, as OA did with the Tengu, but perhaps the designer felt it important for all creatures from the spirit realm of Sakkaku to be fey.) Yet, in one of the few deviations from the guidelines, it has the wrong hit dice type for a fey.

Maneseru no Oni are a variant of oni that resemble a blob of darkness. They can spawn duplicates of other characters in order to destroy them.

Mokumokuren is a unique ghost that protects the emperor. The illustration of this creature is extremely intriguing. The ghost appears as a swarm of eyes, and it is an extremely nasty little creature.

Naga are the snakelike creatures that have in the past allied themselves with the clans of Rokugan. Naga come in five varieties, asp, chameleon cobra, constrictor, and greensnake. Each type has different attributes and capabilities. I found it odd that some of the naga, classified as large creatures, only have 1 hit dice. But as is implied in the Rokugan book, many naga have character levels.

Ninja Shapeshifters are minions of an entity known as the lying darkness. Ninja Shapeshifters have alternate form and spell like abilities that they use to sow confusion.

The Oni lords are manifestations of the great evil power of the shadowlands. The oni lords are described, but not stattd, as they are said to be beyond the power of normal mortals to harm.

Plague zombies are a nasty variant of the zombie. They spread a nasty disease that, if it kills the victim, causes the victim to rise as a plague zombie.

Toshigoku spirits are faceless spirits of those that died lusting for blood and revenge. They have the unfortunately nasty attribute of being incorporeal, yet their spirit weapons and armor work fine for them. Their blades bypass armor and inflict negative energy damage.

Ubume, or mourning ghosts, are spirits of women who continue mourning tragedies in their life. Ubume cannot be killed in combat; to deal with them, one must seek to resolve the reason for its mourning.

Zenmensonsu are constructs, animated war machines that shamle out of the shadowlands. There are different varieties, such as tosekiki, which are catapults constructed of animate bone and with a literal arm for the arm of the catapult.

As well, there are a nice selection of templates:

Goryo are vengeful ghosts, who seek to exact vengeance on their killers. Goryo are not considered incorporeal to their

killer. Like Ubume, Goryo cannot be permanently destroyed through combat. They must be exorcized, their killer destroyed or brought to justice, or be convinced that their quest for vengeance is misguided.

Darkness spawn: Mortals that have been corrupted by the lying darkness eventually loose their own identity and become darkness spawn. Darkness spawn appear like the base creature albeit with less distinct features, but gain some spell like abilities including a fearsome shadow bolt, improve abilities and stealth skills, and spell resistance and damage reduction that is bypassed by crystal.

Shadow samurai are spirits of samurai who have died in the shadowlands, and return as a shadowy silhouette of what they once were. They exhibit some vestiges of honorable behavior, but are nonetheless very dangerous.

Shiryo are spirits of those who have passed on. Unlike most undead in this book (or most others d20 system books, for that matter), shiryo are not evil. Rather, they are the benign spirits of blessed ancestors.

The first appendix addresses characters. Level equivalents are provided for playing many of these creatures like ashalan and naga. However, the section refers you to the Dungeon Master's Guide section on the topic, despite the fact that there is a much better method for handling this sort of thing described in the Oriental Adventures book, which they have license to refer to.

In addition, appendix one contains five new prestige classes, two for naga characters (naga slayer and shahadet's legionnaire), two for nezumi (nezumi chuk'tekk "chieftan general" and nezumi rememberer), and the shadow-walker (a pawn of the lying darkness).

Finally, the first appendix goes into greater detail about tainted characters, and defines a number of shadowlands

Continued on page 37

Crescent Island Spellsinger

Aehranda's beaded braids jangled with their own melody, echoing in the stillness of the coastal sunset as the song of the waves filled the ears of the crowd. They watched Aehranda anxiously as she waded ever deeper with the tide, the bobbing sails of dolphin fins circling in the distance. As her song began, the silence of hunger and thirst crawled into dark rocky crevices, hiding from Aehranda's soothing melody.

Slowly, their senses heightened by the gentle tempo of Aehranda's voice, they smiled as a dolphin burst forth from the water before their priestess. The sleek animal gleamed with setting orange sunlight, and its chatter flitted in and out of Aehranda's song before the dolphin slid beneath the waves again.

Further away, another dolphin leapt into the air to join the song, its chirps slower than normal, matching the priestess's song. Then softly, eagerly, the entire pod began to sing in a chorus with Aehranda, the normally staccato bursts of dolphin-speak melding into a soothing, almost cicada-like purr.

The villagers smiled. Their bond with the dolphin pod reaffirmed, they took comfort that they could rely on their singing neighbors to save them from the famine. By the end of the night, the village feasted upon the fish the dolphins had delivered, but Aehranda remained late in the waters, swimming and singing with her other village.

Even when foreign and exotic, song can convey deep meaning and emotion more easily than words, and magic. . . . Well, magic touches the soul in much the same way a song does, deeply, beyond words.

Few mages have the skill or strong voices to adapt their magic to song, but it is a common practice among the sea villages of the Crescent Islands. Perhaps because of their close bonds with the greatest musicians of the oceans—the dolphins and occasional whales—these people understand the power of song as a diverse and ultimately varied means of communication.

The Crescent Islanders worship the songs of the sea, and a skilled mage can befriend this song, make it a constant traveling companion no matter how far from the caressing waves of the ocean she wanders. A spellsinger does not have just her own voice, but also the voices of the entire sea at her command. Pick up a shell, listen to its mouth, and you may just hear its song on the wind.

Hit Die: d4.

Requirements

Spellcasting: Ability to cast at least four spells that have the [sonic] or [language-dependent] descriptors, one of which must be 2nd level or higher. Illusions that create sound, such as ghost sound or major image also count toward this requirement.

Speak Language: Aquan, or the

equivalent language of merfolk or dolphins.

Perform: 4 ranks, including at least two types of vocal-based perform types (a cappella, ballad, chant, choral, madrigal, melody, ode, opera, song, and others at the GM's option).

Spellcraft: 8 ranks.

Swim: 4 ranks.

Other: The prospective spellsinger must spend at least a month at sea, swimming for at least four hours a day among aquatic song creatures like dolphins, merfolk, or sirens (the last option is not recommended). After this exposure, if the spellsinger is accepted by the creatures, she is forever accompanied by their song. Normally this song is audible only to her own ears, and can be ignored at will, but after more practice, the spellsinger will eventually be able to manifest these melodies to be heard by others.

Class Skills

The Crescent Island Spellsinger's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Animal Empathy (Cha, exclusive skill), Concentration (Con), Craft (Int), Intuit Direction (Wis), Knowledge (arcana) (Int), Knowledge (nature) (Int), Listen (Wis), Perform (Cha), Profession (Wis), Scry (Int, exclusive skill), Speak Language (none), Spellcraft (Int), Swim (Str), and Wilderness Lore (Wis). See

PC Spellsingers:

Of course most game worlds don't have the exact Crescent Island presented here, but that doesn't mean that your PC couldn't become one. If you're interested in playing a Spellsinger, discuss with your GM, and see if there is a suitable group of islanders who might cultivate musical spellcasters. On a sea voyage between cities, you may encounter a Spellsinger acting as a shipmage, or perhaps far inland your PC might meet an adventuring Spellsinger who has left her tribe but is willing to train an interested apprentice.

Alternately, Spellcasting might arise in a different habitat than at sea, such as in windy Dwarvish mountain villages, or in Elvish woodlands, where the rustle of leaves holds the forest's song. For more information, see Tone Notes, at the end of this article.



Chapter 4: Skills in the Player's Handbook for skill descriptions.

Skill Points at Each Level: 4 + Int modifier.

Class Features

All of the following are class features of the Crescent Island Spellsinger prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: A Crescent Island Spellsinger gains proficiency in light armor.

Spells Per Day: For the purposes of determining spells per day, caster level, and (for spontaneous spellcasters) spells known, whenever a level as Crescent Island Spellsinger grants the ability "+1 level of existing class," the character adds 1 effective level to one of her previous spellcasting classes.

Spellsinging (Su): Whenever casting a spell, a Crescent Island Spellsinger can choose to increase the casting time to at least three full rounds by singing the spell instead of casting it traditionally. Spells that already require three full rounds or longer to cast do not increase in casting time, but still gain the benefits of spellsong. If she is unable or unwilling

to complete this casting time, the spell fails wholly.

Note that a Spellsinger may choose to continue singing beyond the minimum casting time, and though she cannot take any other actions while maintaining her spellsong (other than a 5-foot adjustment each round), she can choose to finish the spell as a free action.

If the Spellsinger chooses to cast a spell as a spellsong, the spell will always have a verbal component, but will not require somatic components. Though spells cast this way have no somatic component, most armor has poor harmonics that can ruin spellsongs. Unless she wears a suit of Coralsong Armor (see the sidebar elsewhere in this article), the Spellsinger has the normal arcane spell failure chance for her armor, due to poor harmonics. Even if the spell cast is a divine spell, if it is sung, it can be disrupted by armor's poor harmonics.

Another benefit of this ability is that the Spellsinger can cast spellsongs while treading water, since she does not need her hands for somatic components.

Though spellsongs take longer to cast than normal spells, Spellsingers can combine multiple spellsongs for greater

effect. By delaying the completion of their spellsongs to the same moment, a group of Spellsingers working cooperatively may choose from the following benefits. While singing, the Spellsingers can sense each other's intentions, and are thus able to coordinate which effects, if any, they wish to use.

Choral Strength: In any group of simultaneous spellsongs cast by Spellsingers, add the highest Charisma bonus out of all the Spellsingers to the spells' saving throw DCs, in addition to the normal ability modifier. Thus, a sorcerer spellsinger could add her Charisma bonus twice.

Counterpoint: Just as a secondary melody can add an extra layer of meaning to a foreground melody, so can Spellsingers sing in counterpoint to alter the power of their spells. In a group, all the Spellsingers may choose one spellsong as the primary, and use all other spellsongs to modify the main one.

All spells but the main one have no effect when they are completed. Instead, the spell energy from those additional spells strengthens the primary spell. For each other spell, add the spell's level to the primary spell's effective level. These extra levels can be used for free

Crescent Island Spellsinger

Class Level	BAB	Fort. Save	Ref. Save	Will Save	Special	Spells Per Day
1	+0	+0	+0	+2	Spellsinging, Guardian Melody, Sea's Voice	
2	+1	+0	+0	+3	Aural Verisimilitude, Sea's Bond	+1 level of existing class
3	+1	+1	+1	+3	Duo Voca	
4	+2	+1	+1	+4	Song of Tongues	+1 level of existing class
5	+2	+1	+1	+4	Sona Destrachane	
6	+3	+2	+2	+5	Songbolt	+1 level of existing class
7	+3	+2	+2	+5	Ambience	
8	+4	+2	+2	+6	Songburst	+1 level of existing class
9	+4	+3	+3	+6	Trea Voca	
10	+5	+3	+3	+7	Choral Symphony	+1 level of existing class

metamagic that any of the Spellsingers possess as feats. The singer of the primary spellsong intuitively senses what metamagic feats are available out of the group, and can use any of those feats to modify her spellsong.

For example, Aeheranda and another Spellsinger could work in conjunction. Aeheranda casts the main spell-shout while her ally expends a 3rd level spell. The 3rd level spell has no effect, but allows Aeheranda to freely maximize the shout spell (maximize requires three extra levels of metamagic).

Harmony: With three or more spellsongs cast in harmony, if all of the spells target an individual creature or object, the spell's DC for that target is more difficult. The Spellsinger with the greatest bonus to her Perform skill checks makes a Perform check, and the result of this check is the spells' DC for all targets the spells have in common. Even if the spells don't have exactly the same targets, any target that is affected by three or more spellsongs simultaneously must overcome this harmonious song. Spellsongs that do not allow a saving throw do not count toward this requirement of three.

For example, engaged against a group of Sahuagin, Aeheranda uses spellsong to cast a mass charm, while two of her spellsinging companions cast a fireball and cloudkill, respectively. The most powerful Spellsinger in the group makes a Perform check, with a result of 30. Though they choose slightly different targets for their spells, any target caught by all three spells must save against DC 30 for those spells.

If there is a large group of Spellsingers with a complicated overlapping of spells, this ability affects any creature or object affected by at least three spellsongs that are completed simultaneously.

Guardian Melody (Su): The Spellsinger's unconscious control of the sea's song always protects her from sonic attacks. Whenever she makes a saving throw to resist an effect that a Bard's countersong ability could protect against, she also makes a Perform check. She can choose to use either the normal saving throw or the Perform check as her saving throw result. This protection is constant, and applies only to her.

However, a Spellsinger may also choose to spontaneously expend any prepared spell or spell slot of 2nd level or higher to

create an effect identical to the Bard ability countersong. This ability can protect others, in addition to the Spellsinger.

Sea's Voice (Ex): A Crescent Island Spellsinger has resilient lungs and is skilled at managing her breath in the water. She can cast spells with verbal components underwater without penalty, assuming she has air to spare.

She gains a +8 competence bonus to Constitution checks to hold her breath and avoid suffocation. However, she may choose to give up this bonus and instead cast any verbal spell that has a casting time of one action or less. If she does so, she loses the extra air that grants the competence bonus, but can continue to hold her breath normally. On any given gulp of air, she can cast no more than one spell while continuing to hold her breath.

Aural Verisimilitude (Sp): A Spellsinger's voice can emulate nearly any natural sound. Starting at 2nd level, instead of her normal vocalizations, she may use ghost sound as a free action that requires no more concentration than normal speech. This sound originates from her own mouth, but can be substantially louder and more varied. Ghost

Coralsong Armor:

A Crescent Island Spellsinger cannot wear normal armor and still cast her spells effectively, but she can wear specially prepared coral armor, which she must make herself.

Coral armor must be grown, not built. To grow a suit of coral armor, the Spellsinger must first acquire an appropriate bodysuit capable of supporting the living creatures whose shells make up the armor. This suit costs 300 gold pieces to create, but weighs a negligible amount. Thereafter, the Spellsinger must wear the bodysuit while swimming in one of the myriad coral reefs that surround the Crescent Islands for several days, four hours each

day, singing quietly to attract coral or barnacles, which attach to a specially made coat of woven seaweed and whale blubber.

The Spellsinger must spend a number of days growing the suit equal to one plus the square of the AC bonus the Spellsinger wishes the suit to provide, to a maximum of +4 bonus (17 days). The suit weighs 2 pounds for each point of armor protection, but because it is made specifically by the Spellsinger for herself, it has a maximum Dex bonus of +8, no armor check penalty, and no chance of arcane spell failure or spellsong spell failure. Additionally, it is neutrally buoyant, and so incurs no penalty to Swim checks for its weight.

Coralsong armor is considered light armor, and will fit no one but the Spellsinger who crafted it. It can be donned or removed as quickly as getting dressed or undressed normally. Coralsong armor is always considered masterwork, and thus is usually enchanted. The armor typically comes in any array of oceanic colors, though Spellsingers have enough control in their songs to create almost any design and color imaginable.

The Spellsinger must immerse the suit in water for at least one hour every day, or it begins to lose its armor bonus at a rate of 1 point per day. The Spellsinger need not wear the armor while it is immersed.

sound can create noise equal to up to twenty normal humans, as loud as the roar from a huge dire cat.

A Will save (DC 10 + the Spellsinger's Charisma bonus) can realize these sounds to be unnatural.

Sea's Bond: At 2nd level, a Spellsinger may add aquatic animal friendship to her spell list as a 1st level spell, regardless of what class she is. This functions just as animal friendship, but only for aquatic animals.

Duo Voca (Su): At 3rd level, the Spellsinger gains the ability to manifest the ambient song that surrounds her into a second singing voice. This is not her voice, but the song of the sea, accompanying her, obeying her command. The second voice sounds similar to her own, but slightly more distant, tinged with the subtle hints of crashing surf. The second song always obeys her will and can be silenced as a free action.

This second voice can be used to cast spellsongs, but not normal spells. As a unique exception to the normal timing rules, when spellcasting, a Spellsinger gains a bonus action that can be used only to begin singing another spellsong. Obviously, this ability can only be used if one of the Spellsinger's voices is unoccupied. If her concentration is threatened while attempting to cast two spellsongs at once in this way, the Concentration check DC is determined by adding the levels of the two spellsongs together.

For example, Aehrandra could begin casting a summon monster III (3rd level) in the first round of combat with her normal voice, then in the second round of combat begin casting a shout spell (4th level) with her duo voca. The casting time for these spells is increased to a minimum of two rounds, and if she was damaged while singing both spells, the Concentration check would be as if she were trying to cast a 7th level spell. Failure would result in both spells being disrupted.

If the Spellsinger chooses to have both spells finish simultaneously, her spells become more powerful just as if two Spellsingers had been singing cooperatively. Thus, in round 1, she could begin a summon monster III, then begin a shout in round 2. The summon monster III spell would complete just before her action on round 3, but she could choose not to finish the spell until just before her action on round 4, when she would complete casting shout. The two spells would occur simultaneously, benefiting from the Choral Strength ability, and possibly Counterpoint.

Song of Tongues (Sp): Three times per day, a Spellsinger of 4th level or higher can cast tongues on herself. However, the spell only translates song, so both sides must be singing to understand each other. Because Spellsingers tend to have melodious voices, few question when they hear one speaking to them in song, but a gravel-voiced Dwarf who has to reply in kind would often be uncomfortable.

Sona Destrachane (Su): Whenever a Spellsinger of 5th level or higher casts a spell with the descriptor [acid], [cold], [electricity], [fire], or [force], she may choose to instead change this descriptor to sonic, so that a wall of fire would become a wall of thunder, and acid fog would damage targets with waves of sonic energy. The altered spell functions the same as the original, except for obvious differences. For instance, a sonic fireball cannot set things on fire.

Modifying a spell with this ability increases its casting time the same as it would for a sorcerer altering a spell with a metamagic feat. Even if the Spellsinger normally prepares her spells, the casting time is still increased. However, actual spellsongs (which already take at least 2 full rounds to cast) are not increased in casting time.

Songbolt (Sp): As a full-round action, a Spellsinger of 6th level or higher may use her ambient song to shout forth a sonic attack. The Spellsinger must succeed a

ranged touch attack at a maximum range of 30 feet. If the attack hits, the target takes 1d6 points of sonic damage plus extra of sonic damage equal to the Spellsinger's Charisma bonus, if any.

Ambience (Sp): Beginning at 7th level, a Spellsinger can subtly alter the ambient song around her to arouse particular emotions. Once per day, the Spellsinger can cast emotion, with a 15-ft. radius, centered on herself. This effect lasts as long as the Spellsinger concentrates, and for a number of minutes thereafter equal to her Charisma bonus, if any. The Spellsinger chooses any emotion effect other than Fear or Rage, and the subtle music around her instills that emotion in the listeners.

At any time during this ability's duration, as a free action, the Spellsinger may designate which targets are or are not affected by the ambient song.

Songburst (Sp): An 8th level Spellsinger may, as a full-round action, let her ambient song burst out in a sonic blast. All creatures other than the Spellsinger within a 15-ft. radius take 1d6 points of sonic damage, plus extra of sonic damage equal to the Spellsinger's Charisma bonus, if any.

Trea Voca (Su): At 9th level, the Spellsinger can manifest a third voice from the ambient ocean's song. This third voice sounds older and slightly deeper than the Spellsinger's original voice, like the ancient ocean.

The trea voca has all the same abilities as the duo voca, including the ability to sing independently of the Spellsinger. It is thus possible for the Spellsinger to begin a spellsong in a first round, have her second voice begin singing in the second round, and then her third voice start in the third round. She could then delay to have all three songs complete just before her action on the fifth round.

As with casting two songs, however, the Concentration DC to maintain control of three songs is as difficult as if the spell levels were all added together. If

Aehranda attempted to cast summon monster III, shout, and mass suggestion, she would be casting the equivalent of a 13th level spell for the purposes of Concentration checks.

Choral Symphony (Su): At earlier levels, with her duo voca and trea voca abilities, the Spellsinger could begin singing several spells at once. At 10th level, she gains the ability to control the ocean's voices independently of her own, allowing her to perform normal actions while her ambient song sings.

The Spellsinger can cast one spell each round as a free action, assuming both her additional voices are unoccupied. However, in order to do so, she must expend an additional prepared spell or

spell slot of the same level or higher than the spell she intends to cast. This ability manifests as a many-voiced choir that fills the air around the Spellsinger.

For example, a vicious sea demon has threatened Aehranda's village, and she confronts it at the shoreline. As she speaks with the demon, assuring it that it shall die for the suffering it has caused, an ominous chorus arises around her, swelling as her wrath intensifies. When Aehranda leaps to attack, the choral symphony crescendos, sending forth a crashing wave of magical energy and soaring force. As the battle progresses, Aehranda can continue to battle the demon in melee as a symphony of oceanic magic aids her. ♦

Tone Notes-Spellsinging:

Consider if the source of a Spellsinger's song truly is a sentient entity of great magical power, a blessing of the gods, just a new way of practicing magic, or something wholly different. In a horror game, the Song could be the ululating cries of some siren-like beast, luring the unwary into unspeakable cities hidden by the depths of the sea. In a comic game, they could be the spirits of humpback whales who continue mating in the afterlife, or perhaps the psychic manifestation of all the lemmings who plunge into the seas in mass suicides. The default presentation should not limit your imagination.

Additionally, if your campaign is not located by the seacoast, you could easily alter this class to fit other cultures and environments.

Moaning of the Old Mountains: Dwarvish mountain villagers have always been familiar with the low moaning of the mountain winds, and they revere this song as being older than even their clans. Dwarvish priests sometimes form a connection with this mountain wind, befriending the eagles and other birds that soar through the mountains. Wearing masterfully

prepared armor mithril chain (mithril being the only metal capable of properly holding a tune), these Old Mountain Spellsingers can climb tirelessly to even the highest peaks, singing with the frigid winds.

Effect: Change the prerequisites to require Climb instead of Swim, and Auran instead of Aquan. Climb is a class skill instead of Swim. Instead of Sea's Voice, the Spellsinger gains a +4 bonus to Fortitude saves to resist cold weather. The Sea's Bond ability instead is the Sky's Bond, and allows the charming of birds. They can wear mithril armor without disrupting their spellsongs.

The Rustling of the Emerald Woods: Elvish communities are well aware of the constant rustling of wind and leaf through their forests, and some Elves with a keen ear can discern a voice amid the chattering of the leaves. They say the woods are alive, and always talking, but even the subtle lives of Elves are too loud, drowning out the forest's voice.

Effect: Change the prerequisites to Move Silently and Sylvan instead of Swim and Aquan. Move Silently is a class skill instead of Swim. Sea's Voice

is instead grants a +4 bonus to Listen checks in woodland surroundings, and Sea's Bond instead allows for the charming of woodland creatures. An Emerald Wood Spellsinger can cast spellsongs in armor made of wood, which can be shaped by song to fit her body.

Full Moon's Howl: Human savannah tribes revere the spirit of the Wolf, and its supernatural howl that pierces through the night, frightening from a distance. Brave youths who risk running with the wolves on a full moon can earn their trust, being forever accompanied by their howls.

Effect: Change the prerequisites to the Run feat instead of Swim and Aquan. Add Intimidate as a class skill instead of Swim. Sea's Voice grants a +8 bonus to Constitution checks to avoid exhaustion while running, and Sea's Bond instead allows for the charming of wolves. They can cast spellsongs in wolf hide, which acts as leather armor.

Similar changes could open up this prestige class to countless other settings and cultures that revere mystical and magical sounds and songs.

Shieldmaiden

By Rick Fieldhouse and M. Peters

There have always been tales of warrior women blessed by the gods. It would seem that certain gods feel that their presence is best known in the form of the pure and innocent maiden. Over time, there has grown a small and secret sorority of these shieldmaidens, their membership chosen by gods who feel that the time is right for another young woman to step forward and champion the cause of good. Only in times of great crisis do they ever meet, and when they do, they shine as beacons of virtue and purity over the bloody field of battle. They fight and they protect, urged on by voices unheard by all around them.

To take on the burden they must carry, they are strong of arm, and strong of character. Unlike a paladin, they serve a more martial calling, always battling for right and protecting the innocent. More often than not, a shieldmaiden is from simple peasant origins, as the middle and upper classes often lack the humility that the calling requires.

The life of a shieldmaiden is one filled with sorrow and heartbreak. She travels the world trying to right its wrongs, driven forward by divine and holy purpose. She finds herself denying herself romantic love for her love of good, justice, and holy service.

The common people see shieldmaidens as near mythical beings sent to protect the helpless and deliver justice, but the upper class tends to see them as idealistic troublemakers who give the rabble a false sense of hope.

Hit dice: d10

Requirements

To qualify to become a shieldmaiden, a character must fulfill all the following criteria.

Alignment: Any Good

Base Attack Bonus: +6

Knowledge (religion): 5 ranks

Feats: Power Attack, Shield Focus (Netbook of Feats), Shield Mastery (Netbook of Feats)

Special: To be a shieldmaiden the character must be a virgin woman who has received the call of one or more gods to go forth and combat evil.

Class Skills

Craft (Int), Climb (Str), Diplomacy (Cha), Handle Animal (Cha), Heal (Wis), Jump (Str), Knowledge (religion) (Int), Knowledge (War) (Int), Ride (Dex), Sense Motive (Wis), Swim (Str)

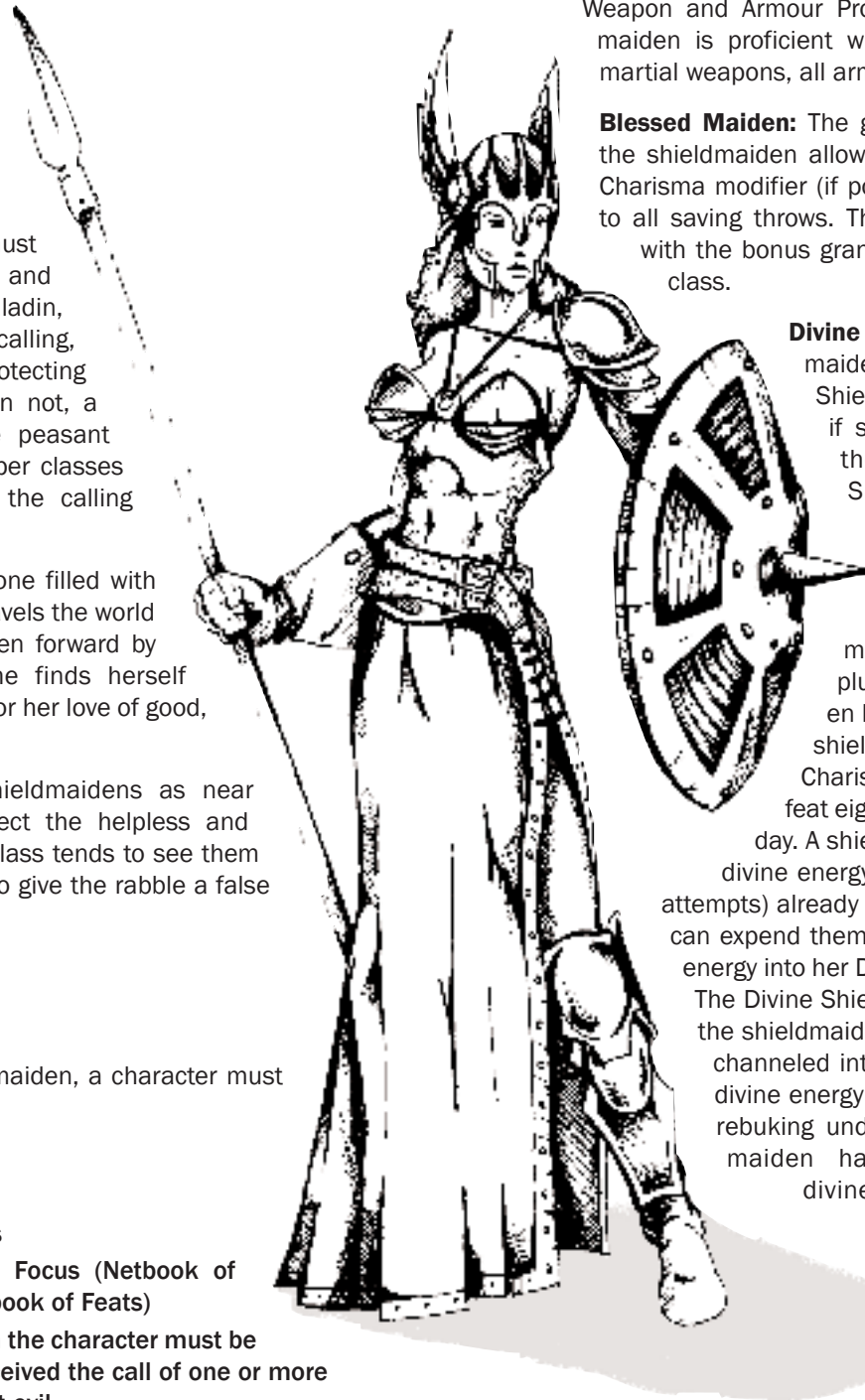
Skill Points at Each Level: 2 + Int modifier.

Class Features

Weapon and Armour Proficiency: A shieldmaiden is proficient with all simple and martial weapons, all armour, and shields.

Blessed Maiden: The gods' patronage of the shieldmaiden allows her to apply her Charisma modifier (if positive) as a bonus to all saving throws. This does not stack with the bonus granted by the paladin class.

Divine Shield: The shieldmaiden gains the Divine Shield feat (Dotf) even if she does not have the prerequisites. She can use this feat a number of times each day equal to 3 plus her Charisma modifier (if positive) plus her shieldmaiden level. So a 3rd level shieldmaiden with a 14 Charisma could use the feat eight (3+2+3) times a day. A shieldmaiden who has divine energy (turning/rebuke attempts) already from another class can expend them and channel their energy into her Divine Shield ability. The Divine Shield uses granted by the shieldmaiden class cannot be channeled into any other use of divine energy such as turning or rebuking undead. If the shieldmaiden has been granted divine energy from another class, she does not count her Charisma towards the extra



divine energy granted by the shieldmaiden class.

Extra Turning: A shieldmaiden can select the Extra Turning feat and use the additional turning attempts it grants to increase the number of times each day she can use Divine Shield or Divine Might. If she already has the feat, she can use the turning attempts granted by it to fuel either power.

Shield of the Virgin: A shieldmaiden is granted the Two Weapon Fighting and Ambidexterity feats when fighting with a shield and a weapon she can use in her other hand. She gains access to these feats even if she does not have the required Dexterity score. These feats only apply when she is fighting with a small shield, or large shield, either regular or spiked.

Fearless Virgin: Starting at 2nd level, a shieldmaiden is immune to all kinds of fear (magical or otherwise). Allies who are within 10 feet of her, and can see her, gain a +4 morale bonus on saving throws against all kinds of fear. Granting this morale bonus to allies is a supernatural ability.

Shield Another: At 3rd level, a shieldmaiden can use her shield to protect a creature her size category or smaller who is within five feet of her for one round as long as she remains within 5 feet of that creature. While doing this, she neither gains the shield's defensive bonus, nor can she attack with it. But, she can use her Divine Shield feat to increase the shield's protective ability to benefit the creature being shielded. She may also attack with her non-shield arm as normal.

Quickened Divine Shield: At 4th level, using the Divine Shield feat can be performed as a free action any time during a shieldmaiden's turn.

Divine Might: At 5th level, the shieldmaiden gains the Divine Might feat (DotF). This feat uses the same pool of divine energy as her Divine Shield ability.

Virgin's Tears: At 6th level, the purity of a shieldmaiden's soul is becoming an undeniable force. Three times a day, her very tears can be used as a potion of cure moderate wounds, as if created by a cleric of her level. The tears must be administered within one round, and they

cannot be stored or preserved in any way. The shieldmaiden cannot benefit from her own tears. It takes the shieldmaiden five consecutive rounds to summon forth the healing tears. The time she spends doing this provokes attacks of opportunity. During these five rounds, the only other action a shieldmaiden may take is using the Heal skill to stabilize or otherwise care for a wounded comrade.

Sacrifice: At 7th level, if a Shieldmaiden is using her Shield Another ability, she choose to take the damage from any attack that manages to strike the person she is protecting. If the person she is protecting is targeted by a spell or effect requiring a reflex save or a ranged touch attack, the shieldmaiden can protect them, but she suffers the full brunt of the attack, and is automatically hit by the spell or effect and does not receive a saving throw to avoid or reduce the damage or effects.

Forever Young: At 8th level, the gods that had blessed the shieldmaiden originally wish to preserve her youthful innocence and beauty as long as

The Shieldmaiden

Level	BAB	Fort	Reflex	Will	Special
1	+1	+0	+0	+2	Blessed Maiden, Divine Shield, Shield of the Virgin
2	+2	+0	+0	+3	Fearless Virgin
3	+3	+1	+1	+3	Shield Another
4	+4	+1	+1	+4	Quickened Divine Shield
5	+5	+1	+1	+4	Divine Might
6	+6	+2	+2	+5	Virgin's Tears
7	+7	+2	+2	+5	Sacrifice
8	+8	+2	+2	+6	Forever Young
9	+9	+3	+3	+6	Quickened Divine Might
10	+10	+3	+3	+7	Celestial Virgin

possible. The shieldmaiden no longer ages, and cannot be magically aged. While she is not granted any additional years of life, she does not suffer any penalties from aging but she does accrue any bonuses that her years grant her.

Quickened Divine Might: At 9th level, the shieldmaiden can activate her Divine Might ability as a free action any time during her turn.

Celestial Virgin: At 10th level, the Shieldmaiden's long and difficult path is rewarded and she becomes a semi-divine being. She is furthermore treated as an outsider, though her native plane is still the prime material. Spells that do not affect outsiders (such as charm person) do not affect her. Additionally she gains damage reduction 20/+1. This means that the shieldmaiden ignores (instantly regenerates) the first 20 points of damage from any attack unless a weapon with a +1 or better enchantment bonus deals the damage, by a spell, or by a form of energy (fire, acid, cold, electricity, etc.).

Code of Conduct: A shieldmaiden must be faithful to the god or gods that bestowed her powers. Upon taking on the mantle of shieldmaiden, she swears to defend what is good and right (according to her god) and to protect the innocent, particularly other women and children. Also, she must remain celibate, if she is to maintain her abilities.

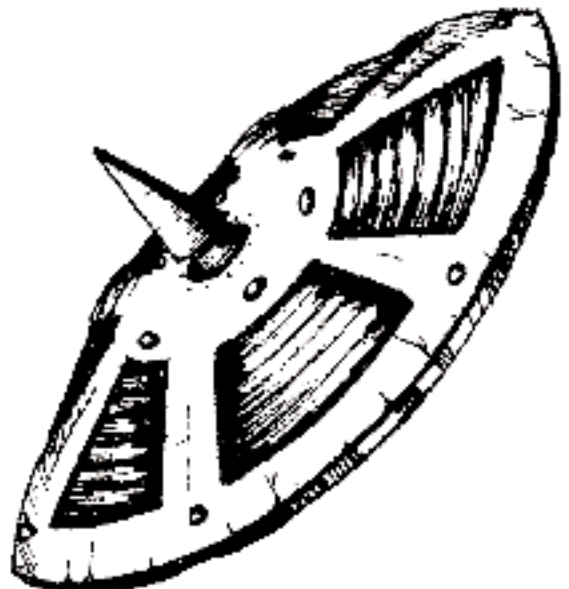
Special Mount: Shieldmaiden levels count towards calculating the abilities of a paladin's special mount if the shieldmaiden has one or more levels in paladin. Due to the special requirements of the class, unicorns are quite comfortable with shieldmaidens as riders, but by no means guaranteed.

Ex-Shieldmaidens

A shieldmaiden who breaks her code of conduct and defies her divine charter loses all special abilities and powers, including access to the Divine Shield feat. Shieldmaidens are sometimes released from their duties and allowed to marry and start families. In these cases, if the ex-shieldmaiden has been faithful in her new life, the gods will allow her access to their former powers for a

limited time if she is using them in defense of her home or family. Other shieldmaidens find that while their bodies remain pure, sometimes their souls are lured to darkness. If a shieldmaiden turns away from the cause of good, she loses all of her special abilities except for Virgin's Tears (assuming she remains a virgin). The one difference is that her Virgin's Tears act as potions of cure moderate wounds, because her dark and bitter heart poisons them. There is no way back to the class, because once her heart is sullied, she is no longer suited for the needs of the gods.

Lastly, a Shieldmaiden whose body is violated against her will is the most fearsome foe. Tales speak of great divine vengeance upon those who would spoil the chosen vessel of the gods. Death of a shieldmaiden in combat is one thing, but destruction of her purity brings down divine wrath upon her transgressors. ♦



Back in the Academy....

Schools for the Military Minded

Fighting schools are significantly less common than training organizations for other races. While it's generally accepted that classes such as the cleric, wizard and rogue all require some kind of specialized training, the skills of the fighter are commonly available. Mercenaries and soldiers of all races have at least some combat skills, and anyone interested in learning to use a sword can usually pick up everything they need from a few years in the local militia. While the idea of some kind of formal training school or academy is mentioned in the Players Handbook, it is often disregarded or ignored. There are some advantages, however, that make the school attractive to someone seeking to learn the art of the sword. Some of these are:

Reputation - most academies are usually built around the style of a master, a high level fighter of some renown. By joining a school and becoming recognized as a student of a particular master, a fighter can gain respect and awe from the local populace. By mastering the fighting style of a school and improving on, a fighter can become famous enough to start a school of his own.

Classes - By learning the arts of combat within a group, a fighter will naturally graduate with a group of peers. As the character advances through levels, these peers become allies they can take advantage of, rivals they can struggle against and even familiar faces turning up as enemies.

Alma-mater - Usually when the adventuring party goes looking for help, the cleric will retreat to his temple, the wizard to his master and the thief to his guild. More often than not, a fighter's background leaves him with a few army buddies at best, and a gray patch in his memory at worst. Graduates of an academy always have somewhere to turn. Many academies can provide equipment, lodging and even employment for their graduates. A fighter who achieves the status of master may

even be permitted to take students out for specialized "training missions."

For those wanting to introduce schools into their game immediately, this article introduces three fully fleshed out schools of combat available to both player and non-player characters: The Kurshwan Academy, The Thundun School and Trocha's Academy.

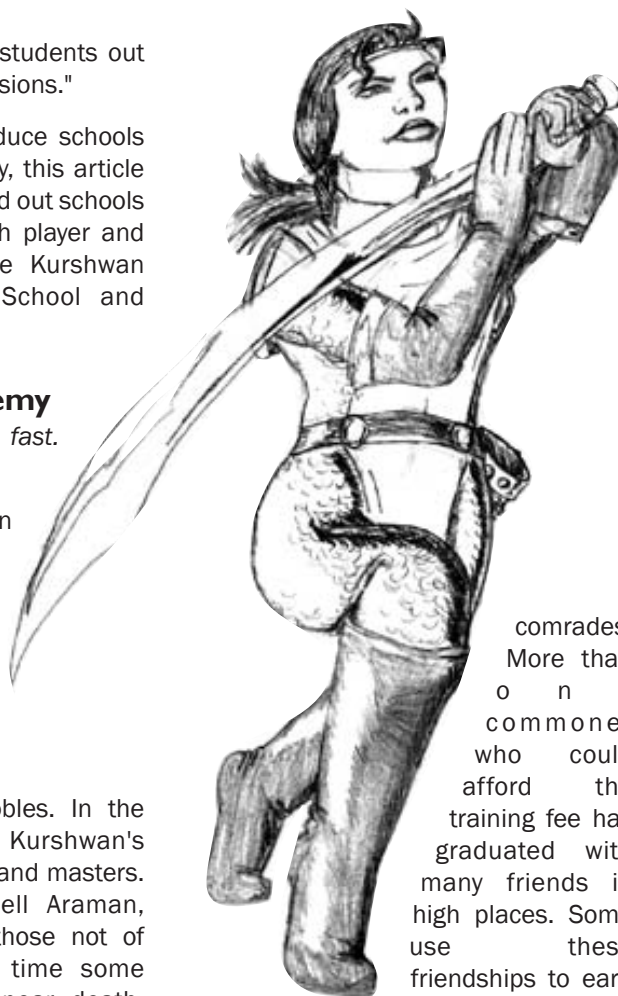
The Kurshwan Academy

Motto: "Strike hard. Strike fast. Strike well"

The Academy at Kurshwan hill has a long and proud history. The small, stone keep that houses the academy grounds was built nearly 300 hundred years ago, constructed by the retiring general Alamn Kurshwan to serve as a training hall for young nobles. In the years since his death, Kurshwan's academy has seen three grand masters. The last of these, Mardell Araman, opened the academy to those not of noble birth for the first time some seventy years ago. Now near death, many in the surrounding region wait for news on his replacement, and whether Araman's decision will be reversed.

The Kurshwan style is swift and graceful, focusing on the ability to make a single powerful strike and then retreat from the enemies reach. Kurshwan fighters are rarely heavily armored, but their skill and precision with the falchion is renowned. One of Kurshwan's most famed feats was to leap amidst a clan of orcs, slaying nine and retreating before their comrades had even reacted. When the horde gave chase, Kurshwan would simply slay those in the front line and fall back, eventually bringing a force of forty down to seven.

Those who train at Kurshwan academy are often put on an even footing with the younger generation of the nobility, and graduates are encouraged to view their fellows as brothers rather than



comrades. More than one commoner who could afford the training fee has graduated with many friends in high places. Some use these friendships to earn places in noble

houses as guard captains or bodyguards, while others are content to meet their comrades on a social level. For the adventuring fighter, these old comrades can be useful sources of adventure as well as a source of information regarding events that occur in the ruling class.

While there are many fighters among the students, a few of the less diligent students advance as aristocrats.

Cost: The Academy typically charges an enrollment fee of 100 gp. First level Fighters seeking to train at the academy are assumed to have paid this fee, although those wishing to join at a later date should be charged full enrollment.

Any fighter that trains at Kurshwan academy is given a falchion, free of charge. 1st level fighters who choose this school may add the falchion to their equipment free of charge.

Location: Kurshwan Academy is located in an empty stretch of hills, at least two days hike from the nearest town. The desolation was chosen to encourage students to stop thinking of themselves as nobility and more as warriors. The surrounding country-side is infested with numerous small tribes of goblins and orcs, many of which fall under the blades of Kurshwan students during training.

Uniform: The traditional armor for a Kurshwan fighter is a chain shirt or breastplate, worn over a simple uniform of dark blue breaches, black boots and tunic. Students of the style can usually be identified by their weapon of choice, the falchion, and a deep red sash worn around the waist. Often, the tips of the sash will be marked with a white band for every feat its wearer has learned.

Ability Scores: The Kurshwan style favors strength and dexterity, and those without above average scores in both abilities will often never progress beyond the rank of novice, no matter how skilled at combat they eventually become.

Fighting Style: One of the icons of the Kurshwan academy is its focus in mastering the falchion - a graceful, two handed weapon with a high critical threat range that perfectly suits the Kurshwan fighting philosophy.

The Kurshwan fighting style is swift and efficient, focusing on the ability to make a single, powerful strike and then retreating from the enemies reach. Even among the high-level masters of this style, the full attack is never considered the best option. By their reasoning it is better to place a single attack and retreat, thereby denying an equally skilled opponent the chance to land multiple attacks in retaliation.

Feat Progression: The feat progression advocated by the academy is, in order, Weapon Focus (Falchion), Dodge, Power Attack, Mobility, Lightning Reflexes, Cleave, Spring Attack, Weapon Specialization (Falchion), Great Cleave and Improved Critical (Falchion).

Until they master the first three feats, students are considered novices of the style. After attaining the remaining feats, a student is named a master of the Kurshwan style.

Skills: The academy doesn't focus its students towards any particular pastime, although dancing is encouraged as a pastime (its focus on precision in movement is seen as complimentary to the academies fighting style), and many common students accumulate a basic understanding of common etiquette from their more noble comrades.

Training: The Academy encourages a great deal of fencing and running in its training. Many graduates, when they gather in later years, remember years of pre-dawn sprints as part of their daily routine, as well as hour after hour of fencing, learning different strike and parries. The most dangerous part of the Academies training is easily the cross country sprint, a monthly event where students are sent racing in teams of five across the goblin filled hills, charged with being the first to reach the finish line regardless of humanoid interference.

Typical Kurshwan Student, Human Ftr 2; CR 2; Medium Humanoid; HD 2d10+4; hp 17; Init +1; Spd 30 ft; AC 16 (touch 11, flat-footed 10); Atk +4 melee (2d4+3/19-20, masterwork falchion); AL LN; SV Fort +5, Ref +1, Will +1; Str 15, Dex 13, Con 14, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 8.

Skills and Feats: Perform (Dancing, Epic) +1, Diplomacy +1, Knowledge (nobility) +3; Dodge, Mobility, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (Falchion).

Possessions: *Chain shirt* +1, *potion of cat's grace*, masterwork falchion, 75 gp.

Keldon Ramar, Kurshwan Master, Human Ftr 12; CR 12; Medium Humanoid; HD 12d10+24; hp 102; Init +7; AC 20 (touch 14, flat-footed 17); Atk +14/+9/+4 melee (2d4+9/12-20, *keen falchion* +1); AL LN; SV Fort +11, Ref +8, Will +6; Str 18, Dex 16, Con 15, Int 11, Wis 13, Cha 14.

Skills and Feats: Perform (Dancing, Epic, Lute) +9, Diplomacy +11, Knowledge (Nobility) +7; Cleave, Dodge, Great Cleave, Improved Bull Rush, Improved Critical (Falchion), Improved Initiative, Lightning Reflexes, Mobility, Power Attack, Run, Skill Focus (Diplomacy), Spring Attack, Weapon Focus (Falchion), Weapon Specialization (Falchion).

Possessions: *Keen falchion* +1, *chain shirt* +2, *ring of protection* +1, *ring of jumping*, *gauntlet's of ogre power*, *gloves of dexterity* +2, *cloak of resistance* +1, *potion of cat's grace*, *potion of endurance*, *potion of cure moderate wounds* (x2).

Current rumor places Keldon Ramar as head of the Academy after Mardell Araman's eventual death. A tall, dark-haired nobleman, Keldon has been a part of the academy for nearly fourteen years. The youngest son of a minor family, Keldon's training began at the age of thirteen. Unlike many of his peers, he chose not to leave the academy after graduation. Instead, he has spent nearly two decades training and teaching, sparing with Araman in the evenings and taking first-year students at the academy for extended training runs through the nearby hills.

Keldon is usually described as well-spoken but quiet, only ever at home with a blade in his hand. It's rumored that he has added more tricks to his repertoire than are known amongst the Kurshwan graduates, and rumor often seems validated by the notches he's worked up on his blade. It's said that should he become the new Grand Master of the Academy, the fighting style may see its first alterations in nearly three centuries.

The Thundun School

Motto: "Break a snakes fang and he can no longer bite you."

The Thundun School is less than fifty years old, but has already gained a widespread reputation. The first school was opened by Rugdin Thundun, a dwarven adventurer and smith. While popular

amongst dwarves, many of Rugdin's students have since opened their own schools, so the style has rapidly become recognized and wide-spread.

Students of the Thundun school are taught to be constantly alert and ready for attack. The style formed out of Rugdin's principle philosophies regarding combat: "The quickest way to win is to be the only person armed" and "If a dwarf didn't forge it, it's destined to break."

Training in Thundun's style is cheap and widely available, so it is favored by many fighters who travel widely. There is a friendly rivalry between students from different branches of the school, but as a result of so much focus on defense and prevention many students are fiercely protective of the school as a whole.

Cost: The initial cost to enroll in the Thundun school is 40 gp. After this, students are typically charged 10 gp a month for further training, although anyone bearing the school badge is considered enrolled at all other training centers. 1st level fighters who choose to belong to the Thundun school are usually assumed to have paid for their enrollment, although later training will be charged at normal prices.

Advantages: Every branch of the school has close ties to a dwarven weaponsmith. Those who have mastered the basics of Thundun are often able to attain masterwork arms and armor through the school at a discount of up to 10%.

Location: The school has spread rapidly, and can be found in many large towns and cities. Typically, the schools don't appear to be anything out of the ordinary. They're simple stone buildings, with a forge attached, usually marked with the schools badge. Whenever possible, the schools will be built close to dwarven communities.

Uniform: Thundun has no set uniform, but they are given a golden badge bearing the schools insignia of a broken

sword. Many students tend to wear this badge with pride, and several have had the mark put onto shields or tabards.

There is no intensive weapon training associated with the school, but among dwarven students the warhammer is particularly common.

Ability Scores: Thundun focuses on strength, alertness and quick wits. Those with above average strength and intelligence scores get the most mileage out of the school.

Fighting Style: Thundun is a primarily defensive style. Students are taught that if one side of a conflict is unarmed or alert, the battle is almost won. Focus is primarily placed on defense and rendering foes defenseless, either through disarming them or destroying their weapons. When facing an armed opponent, Thundun students are taught to fight a defensive battle until the situation is rectified.

Feat Progression: The feat progression advocated by the Thundun School is, in order: Alertness, Improved Initiative, Quick Draw, Expertise, Power Attack, Sunder, Improved Disarm, Improved Unarmed Strike, and Blind-fight.

Until they master the first three feats, students are considered novices of the style. Thundun declares no masters, believing that any warrior can continue to learn more. However, students are encouraged to keep record of how many opponents weapons they've shattered. Any student that breaks more than 30 weapons will be awarded the title of sword-breaker and earn the respect of his fellows.

Skills: Students of Thundun are taught Craft (Weaponsmith) in order to better learn the strengths and weaknesses of weapons.

Training: A great deal of Thundun training is researched based. Students spend hours studying examples of individual weapons, learning the best location to strike and each weapons

inherent weakness. Most weapon training involves being outnumbered, forcing a student onto a defensive footing until it becomes a natural response in any combat situation.

Typical Thundun Student, Dwarf Ftr 2; CR 2; Medium Humanoid; HD 2d10+6; hp 22; Init +0; Spd 15 ft; AC 19 (touch 10, flat-footed 19); Atk +5 melee (1d8+2/x3, masterwork warhammer); SQ Dwarven abilities; AL LN; SV Fort +6, Ref +0, Will +0; Str 15, Dex 11, Con 16, Int 13, Wis 10, Cha 8.

Skills and Feats: Craft (Weaponsmith) +6, Listen +5, Spot +5; Alertness, Improved Initiative, Quick Draw.

Possessions: 2 *Potions of vision*, *potion of bull's strength*, *everburning torch*, masterwork half-plate, masterwork large steel shield, masterwork warhammer, 78 gp.

Rugdin Thundun, Founder of the Thundun School, Dwarf Ftr 9/Exp 3; CR 11; Medium Humanoid; HD 9d10+27 (Ftr) + 3d6+9 (Exp); hp 108; Init +4; Spd 15 ft; AC 22 (touch 10, flat-footed 22); Atk + 16/+11 melee (1d8+5/x3, adamantine battleaxe); SQ Dwarven abilities; AL LN; SV Fort +10, Ref +4, Will +6; Str 16, Dex 11, Con 16, Int 18, Wis 10, Cha 8.

Skills and Feats: Appraise +10, Bluff +4, Craft (Armorsmith) +19, Craft (Weaponsmith) +19, Craft (Blacksmith) +19, Knowledge (History) +10, Listen +12, Profession (Miner) +6, Sense Motive +10, Spot +12; Alertness, Blind Fight, Deflect Arrow, Expertise, Improved Disarm, Improved Initiative, Improved Unarmed Strike, Power Attack, Quick Draw, Sunder.

Possessions: Adamantine battleaxe, *large steel shield* +2, *dwarven plate*, *potions of bull's strength* (x2), *potions of cure moderate wounds* (x2), *potion of blur*.

It was never Rugdin Thundun's intention to open a school for fighters. Originally the dark-haired dwarf was a miner and

smith who specialized in weapon craft. It was only after years behind the forge, creating weapons for his clansmen, that Rugdin first picked up a blade. Even now, after years as a fighting instructor, Rugdin still feels most at home when working steel.

His training as a fighter came largely from experience, spending his apprentice years guarding trade caravans that carried goods to human trade towns. He gathered notice as a warrior for his unorthodox style - a tendency to hold his shield close and guard well until an opportunity was in place to strike at a foe's weapons. Rugdin's philosophy of weapon-sundering spread quickly through dwarven fighters across the land. Many were attracted by the idea of proving the superiority of dwarven steel while defeating a foe, reveling in the chance to add insult to injury. By the time Rugdin had achieved his twentieth year as a master weaponsmith, he was getting more requests for training than weapon orders. Rugdin, ever aware of an opportunity to earn gold, quickly attached a training school to his forge.

The Thundun school is based upon Rugdin's theories on the superiority of dwarven arms and armor. When training students, Rugdin insists that they study the merits and flaws of all races weapon-smithing. He encourages all his students to try their hands at smithing, and advocates the use of arms and armor forged by your own two hands. He routinely shuns all enchanted arms and most enchanted armors, trusting in the strength and quality of his own work.

Trocha's Battalion

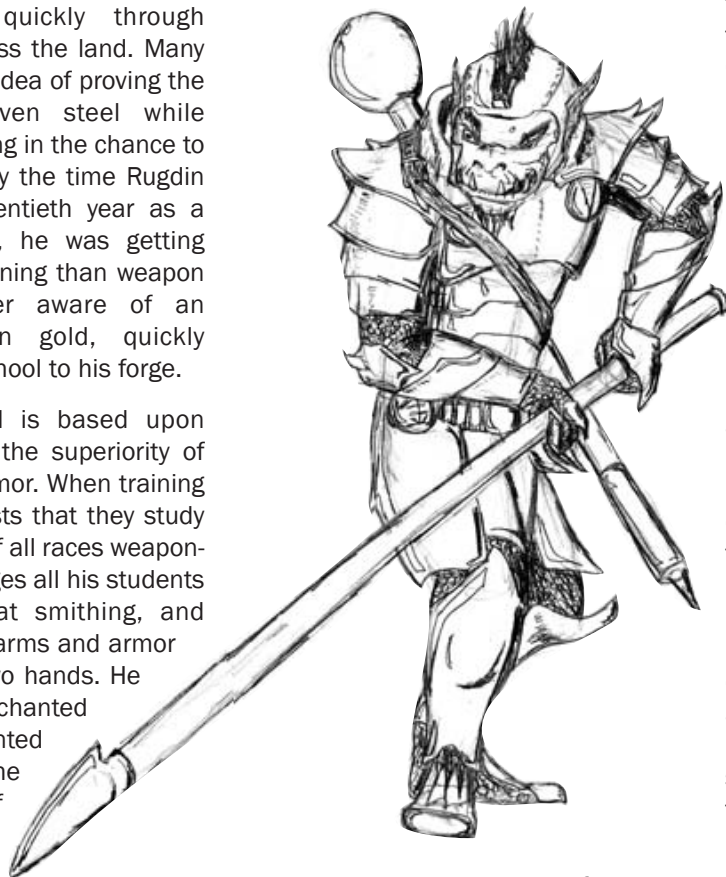
Motto: "Crush."

Trocha's Battalion is the brain-child of Uhgrah Trocha, a half-orc fighter of surprising skill. Formed only a decade ago, it is still largely unknown. What little that is learned is through rumor,

conjecture and the broken lips of those who survive the brutal attacks orchestrated by Trocha's students.

Trocha's typical students are rarely human or demi-human. The Half-Orc instead makes his gold by offering to train larger races in the art of battle, typically ogres and hill giants that have been pressed into service by a greater power.

Trocha's style is simple, but effective. His training works to enhance the advantages larger races already have in combat, while teaching them techniques that serve to eliminate some of their shortcomings.



Amongst beings that know of Trocha's reputation, wearing the insignia of his battalion generates much respect. While there is little feeling of loyalty amongst Trocha's students, but there is an uneasy truce adopted. Unless specifically ordered to do so by a commander or master, Trocha's students rarely fight another student to the death.

Cost: Trocha typically charges 1000 gp per student trained, but this price guarantee's his services as trainer and weapons-master for an entire year. It is known that the Warlock, Telthier, paid this price to turn his rag-tag group of ogres into a fearsome military force.

Location: Trocha has no permanent location, but typically sets up camp in one location for any time between 3 months and a year. He usually prefers mountainous regions, and his camps are often well guarded by large numbers of his students.

Uniform: Trocha's Battalion has no set uniform, although when they're training they wear a black sash across their chest to identify themselves as students. Graduates typically wear helmets that are painted blood red, preferably with plumes, in an imitation of Trocha's helm.

Ability Scores: Trocha is usually aware of his students strengths and limitations. His style focuses on strength related feats, and has techniques are easy enough to learn no matter how dim the student.

Fighting Style: Trocha's style is brutal and simple, in keeping with his students limitations. His students are taught to use both size and strength against their opponents when possible, and to avoid falling into situations where these advantages become drawbacks. If time and ability permits, Trocha's second stage of training is focused on enhancing reaction time and willpower among his recruits. While he rarely reaches such levels in his training, any student of Trocha's style who masters these techniques becomes a force to be reckoned with.

When in combat, a student of Trocha's style will position himself to make best use of reach and cleave attacks. Power attacks and Bull Rushes are also common.

Feat Progression: The feat progression taught by Trocha is, in order, Power Attack, Improved Bull Rush, Cleave,

Improved Initiative, Great Cleave, Lightning Reflexes, Iron Will and Improved Critical. Where possible, he will hire local experts to give specialized weapons training. There is little distinction between novices and masters with Trocha's style, although any fighter who reaches Improved Initiative is considered to have started advanced training.

Skills: Trocha makes some attempt to teach his students Move Silently and Hide, but rarely bothers to outline anything more than the basics. Intensive training in the proper use of Intimidation is common.

Training: Trocha usually prefers his training to be practical. After a week or so of exhausting exercise, students will be lead against another force so they can test their skills. Casualties are common, but those that survive advance faster than students of many other schools.

Typical Trocha Student, Ogre Ftr 1; CR 3; Large Giant; HD 4d8+8 (Ogre) + 1d10+2 (Ftr); hp 33; Init -1; Spd 30 ft; AC 21 (touch 9, flat-footed 21); Atk +10 melee (2d6+7, huge masterwork longspear) or +9 melee (2d6+7, huge greatclub; F/R 5 ft by 5 ft/ 10 ft (15-20 ft with longspear); AL LE; SV Fort +9, Ref +0, Will +1; Str 21, Dex 8, Con 15, Int 6, Wis 10, Cha 7.

Skills and Feats: Climb +4, Intimidate -1, Listen +2, Spot +2; Power Attack, Weapon Focus (longspear), Weapon Focus (greatclub).

Possessions: *Potion of bull's strength*, large masterwork half-plate, huge masterwork longspear, huge greatclub, 80 gp.

Uhgrah Trocha, Master of Trocha's Battalion, Half-orc Ftr 14; CR 14; Medium Humanoid (Orc); HD 14d10+14; hp 124; Init +5; Spd 20 ft; AC 20 (touch 10, flat-footed 20); Atk +17/12/+8 melee (1d8+8/19-20/x3, longspear +2); or +18/+13/+8 melee (1d10+9/17-20, bastard sword +3); SQ Darkvision; AL LE; SV Fort +12, Ref +9, Will +8; Str 17, Dex 13, Con 13, Int 13, Wis 10, Cha 8.

Skills and Feats: Hide +3, Intimidate +7, Move Silently +3; Cleave, Great Cleave, Improved Bull Rush, Improved Critical (Bastard Sword, Longspear), Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (Bastard Sword, Longspear), Weapon Specialization (Bastard Sword, Longspear).

Possessions: *Bastard sword* +3, *longspear* +2, *half-plate* +3, *gauntlet's of ogre power*, *cloak of resistance* +2, *stone of alarm*.

Uhgrah first came upon the idea of training ogre's as fighters when he was working as a mercenary. During a raid on a human town, he watched a trio of ogres close and attack with a force of human soldiers. Although the ogres started off decimating the human forces with their clubs, they were rapidly massacred and outnumbered once the human soldiers had come in under their reach.

Uhgrah's first attempt at instilling discipline in an ogre tribe failed, as did his second, but it is while he attempted to train these creatures that refined his skills as a fighter and teacher. He learned quickly from his mistakes, and soon learned to value of a quick blade when his original trainee's turned against him.

On his third attempt he rapidly instilled the skills necessary into a tribe of ogres, training them in the use of armor and longspear. Their first training run, against a group of dwarves, worked surprisingly well. The ogre's kept their ancestral foes at bay with the spears, maintaining position and using defensive strikes to keep the dwarves from closing with their axes. Using these ogres as an example of what his work could achieve, he set out looking for interested parties. At present, it's estimated that over three hundred ogres and hill giants have been trained by Uhgrah's battalion, at least of third of these minions belonging to the Warlock, Telthier.

Uhgrah's first successful trainee's still travel with him, gaining levels and

serving as assistant trainers with particularly stubborn groups. There are at least twelve of these ogres still left living, and all are fanatically loyal to Uhgrah. All of them have received advanced training, making them faster and more stubborn than ordinary ogres. They answer to no-one except Uhgrah.

Uhgrah's plans after he finishes his current commission is to head into the mountains and find a tribe of hill giants. Using his force he hopes to capture and train the larger giants, eventually adding them to the small force of ogres that tour with him.

Making Your Own

If none of the sample schools appeal to you, but you still like the idea of having schools in your game, you're in luck - The process of creating a believable and useful fighter school is easy and not terribly time consuming. Outlined below are the five basic steps used to create the schools above. While the order of these steps shouldn't be set in stone, it's probably the best way to go until you're comfortable with the process.

1) Begin with a Concept.

Work out the basic idea behind your school. Usually, this will revolve around a fighting style. It doesn't have to be terribly in depth to start with. In fact, a single strong idea is usually better than something complex. If you can sum your school's fighting style or philosophy up in one sentence, you're probably off to a good start. Some sample ideas are:

A school focused on using the battle-axe as a defensive weapon

A school whose philosophy is to end a battle in a single strike

A school devoted to mastering and exploiting the advantages of the orcish double-axe

2) Work out the Feat Progression

In D&D, fighters differentiate their fighting style by choosing different feats. Once you've got the basic fighting style of your head, try to work out the feats



necessary to simulate that style, then arrange them into the order you think the school would teach them. Usually, try to pick between seven and nine feats you think fit in with your concept. If you've got the time try to think of two or three ways of arranging the same feats, or try similar sets of feats with minor variations. Look at the different options and work out which ones work best. There's no real right or wrong way to do this, it's just a matter of playing with order until it feels right.

Let's take a look at the school specializing in the double-axe mentioned above. It's relatively easy to imagine a typical student of this school as a brutish, muscular orc who fights in a whirling barrage of blades. Some good feats would be:

Weapon Proficiency (Double Axe) - obviously, this is the foundation of the school.

Weapon Focus, Weapon Specialization and Improved Critical - to emphasize the focus on one weapon.

Ambidexterity, Two Weapon Fighting and Improved Two Weapon Fighting - to make the most of the double-heads.

Power Attack and Cleave - to make the most of the weapons damage rolls.

The exact approach we can use with these feats varies, and each choice places a slightly different emphasis on the schools approach. The order of the first three feats will probably have the most impact on the way the style is perceived. For human fighters of the school, the first three feats will be what they have available from first level. This creates a familiarity with the feats, and encourages a continuation of the same fighting style at higher levels.

For example:

If we put the first three feats as Weapon Proficiency (Double Axe), Power Attack, and Cleave, the style is going to seem more brutal and focused on doing damage. Fighters will often drop points

from their attack roll as hitting your opponent is seen as useless unless you strike him down and move on to the next foe. In the list of feats above, perhaps we could swap out Ambidexterity and replace it with Great Fortitude to emphasis the styles greater focus on strength, power and resilience. Other feats the might be interesting to swap in are Toughness and Endurance.

If the first three feats are instead Weapon Proficiency (Double Axe), Ambidexterity and Two Weapon Fighting, it's easier to see the style's emphasis on using the double-axe as something more elegant. They prefer to whittle an opponent down with multiple attacks, and when selecting the remaining feats for the style the focus is likely to be on getting Weapon Focus, Specialization and Improved Critical as soon as possible.

3) Statistics and Training

Most combat feats require a high feat in some statistics, so go through the requirements for each of the feats in your progression and make notes of any above average statistics required. This helps any players interested in schools work out in a moment if its applicable to their character or not, and by having the physical and mental requirements outlined, it makes it easier to create a visual for a typical student of the style. Sometimes these statistical requirements can cause a shift in your perception of the schools students, causing you to alter or expand your basic concept. If it makes sense to swap out a few of the feats you originally selected, go ahead and do so.

Also, try to put some thought into exactly how the school trains its students. Does it favor hour after hour of fencing duels? Do its students run innumerable obstacle courses to build up their stamina? Do they fight mock battles to the exclusion of all else, or does the school allow them real combat against live opponents? While most of this is essentially flavor text, it does give players

some idea of what went on in their backgrounds. It's not necessary to put the school into the game, but it's worth it the first time a fighter grunts "Back when I was a student in the academy, we had to run six miles a day" when the wizard starts complaining about the walk from town to town.

One important thing to consider at this point is whether any skill are appropriate to the school? Do they enforce some training? Do they encourage the development of some skills? Some schools will have a rigidly defined routine that'll burn all a fighter's skill points if he intends to keep training. Others have a loose guideline, but still let their students learn what they will in their free time.

Finally, decide when students advance in the school. Most schools classify their students as beginners (usually called initiates or apprentices), intermediate (usually non-titled, but occasionally called journeymen or graduates) and masters. Look back through your feat progression. Pick a feat that marks the end of the beginner phase. Usually a good spot is after two or three feats, as this means players will graduate to journeymen at 1st or 2nd level. It's not recommended you leave player characters with a beginner title longer than this. They're already much more skilled than any other class at their level, and are far better than NPC warriors at similar levels. Mastery of a school is gained when all the feats in the selection are chosen.

Back to our example:

A student of our double-axe style needs a strength of 13+ and a dexterity of 15+. The brutal orcish warrior we started with is now more likely to be a lean, agile and muscular fighter who's closer to human, half-elf or even elvish than orcish.

With its focus on mastering the weapon, the double-axe school will involve a lot of sparring against other students. With its focus on building strength and agility, it's

likely students would also run a daily obstacle course.

With it's focus on attacking often, and the sudden realization that many students will have Dexterity scores well above average, it might be worth adding Combat Reflexes into the feat progression.

In order to build hand-eye coordination, students of the school spend rigorous hours learning to juggle (Performance skill). Also, after spending so many hours on the obstacle course, many students end up quite adept at climbing and jumping.

A student of the double-axe style graduates from his apprenticeship after mastering Weapon Focus, Ambidexterity and Two Weapon Fighting.

4) Campaign Details

After you've got the mechanics and style of the school down, it's time to slot it into your campaign. Work out a brief history for the school. At the very least, you need to know how long it's been in existence, who started it and how well known and respected it is. Where is it located? Where does it conduct its training? Keep in mind that most schools will be built around the skills of a high level fighter, so they all have a reputation of some kind. Most of them will also be named after their founders.

If you have the time, work out what the situation is like for students and former students of the school. Is any particular race favored? Are any forbidden from training? What are its semesters like? How long does training take? How many students in a class? How do the students get on, both while they're in training and after they graduate? Many schools will encourage fierce competition between its students, in the hopes it will spur them onto greater skills. Students of such schools tend to graduate as rivals, not quite enemies but always seeking to best one another in the outside world. Others encourage camaraderie among their students, and graduates become

part of an network that seeks to aid and help each other whenever possible.

Also, work out how students of the school are identified. Some schools will use full uniforms. Others prefer the use of badges or insignia. It is rare that a school will turn a student loose in the world without something that identifies him as a part of their tradition.

Working out the campaign details for our double-axe school, we decide:

To name the school Jeurwic Academy.

It's an ancient school, the style having been passed on for nearly a thousand years.

It's original master was a half-elf known as Jeurwic Orc-Friend, a fighter who lived with the orcish tribes for years learning to master their double-axe. Jeurwic is thought responsible for making the weapon popular amongst other races, and is one of the first warriors to turn it into a weapon of grace and elegance.

It's a well respected school, and it's graduates are often called on to combat the still barbaric orcish tribes that trouble the borders of the kingdom.

It's students are primarily humans. Great rivalry is encouraged in the students, although strict codes of conduct prevent them from carrying this rivalry into the outside world. While the code prevents dueling, verbal sparing and one-upmanship is common.

The Academy favors a yellow tabard bearing the emblem of a double axe. All students are required to wear this until graduation, and some continue to wear it with pride after that.

5) Advantages and Cost

In addition to the social advantages mentioned at the beginning of this article, many schools also offer some form of tangible advantage to their students. Some will offer their students free weapons. Other access to cheap healing due to their affiliation with temples. Realistically, the list of fringe

benefits is endless. Ask yourself if your school is capable of offering anything like this.

Once you've worked out any advantages to the style, decide on the enrollment costs and yearly training costs, if any. Unless they're funded by some form of government, all schools will charge their students for training. Those that don't will often require some form of repayment in the form of duty or obligation. Enrollment fee's will vary from campaign to campaign, depending on the advantages and prestige the school provides. It isn't, however, recommended that a player be charged for creating a school-trained fighter at 1st level. Assume the training price has been paid before the character buys equipment.

In our example:

For the sake of simplicity, the Jeurwic Academy offers no real advantages to its students.

The Jeurwic Academy is funded by the local government, so no fees are charged. Anyone is free to train at the academy, but students are required to spend a year as part of the nations border patrol after graduating.

Once you've done all this, you've got more than enough information to introduce a school to your game. Feel free to add any details you think may be necessary or useful. If your games see a lot of combat, or if fighting schools are a common training ground for fighters in your world, it may be a good idea to work out some standard stats for your school's graduates. If your players are more politically minded, it might be worth putting some thought into your school's upper echelons and power structure. The schools are there to enhance you game, so make the most of them. ♦

Scott Greene's
Creature Catalogue
 3^E

BONESUCKER

Large Aberration

Hit Dice: 8d8+24 (60 hp)

Initiative: +1 (Dex)

Speed: 20 ft.

AC: 16 (-1 size, +1 Dex, +6 natural)

Attacks: 4 slams +9/+7/+5

Damage: Slam 1d4+6 plus ability score drain

Face/Reach: 10 ft. by 10 ft./10 ft.

Special Attacks: Improved grab, agony, ability score drain

Special Qualities: Damage reduction 10/+1, all-around vision, darkvision 90 ft.

Saves: Fort +5, Ref +3, Will +7

Abilities: Str 18, Dex 13, Con 17, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 13

Skills: Hide +9, Listen +9, Move Silently +9, Spot +9

Feats: Multiattack

Climate/Terrain: Any land and underground

Organization: Solitary

Challenge Rating: 5

Treasure: Standard

Alignment: Usually neutral evil

Advancement: 9-16HD (Large), 17-24HD (Huge)

A bonesucker is a bizarre creature that stalks the darkness of wastelands and dank caves. Its body resembles a fleshy tree trunk 10 feet in height and about 2 feet thick. The body is encased in a thick, rubbery sheath of flesh and muscle that make the bonesucker highly resistant to injury. Atop the main body of the bonesucker is a mass of eight writhing tentacles that constantly ooze and drip its caustic digestive fluids. Near the top of the body is a ring of black, unblinking eyes which provide the creature with all-around vision and darkvision to a distance of 90 feet. The bonesucker moves about through the use of 5 thick tentacles at its base.

Bonesuckers consume only the bones of an opponent by grabbing it piercing its flesh with its hollow tentacles. The tentacles inject digestive enzymes into the bones, which break down and are sucked up as a pasty meal for the bonesucker; the attack of a bonesucker is horrifyingly painful. Experienced adventurers always know they are nearing the hunting grounds of a bonesucker; the creature leaves boneless the carcasses of its meals lying where it finished with them.

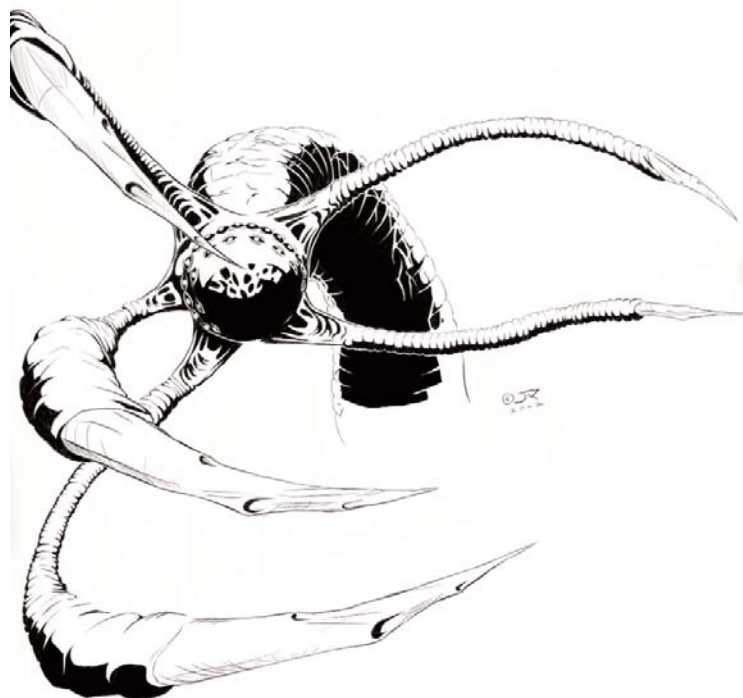
Combat

A bonesucker attacks with its tentacles. Initially, the tentacles appear to be only a foot or two in length but they can extend to a length of approximately 10 feet. It can attack with up to four of its eight tentacles in a single round.

Improved Grab (Ex): To use this ability, a bonesucker must hit a Large or smaller creature with its slam attack. If it gets a hold, it attempts to grapple the opponent.

Agony (Ex): Any creature that has been grappled by a bonesucker must make a Fortitude save (DC 25) every round or be unable to take any actions other than to scream in pain.

Ability Score Drain (Ex): A bonesucker that has grabbed an opponent with a tentacle automatically drains 1d3 points of permanent Dexterity and Strength.



Scott Greene's
Creature Catalogue
 3^E

T'SHANN

Small Aberration

Hit Dice: 4d8+ 4 (22hp)

Initiative: -3 (Dex)

Speed: 5 ft., burrow 5 ft.

AC: 11 (+1 size, -3 Dex, +3 natural)

Attacks: Slam +4 melee

Damage: Slam 1d4 melee

Face/Reach: 5 ft. by 5 ft./5 ft.

Special Attacks: Alien brainwaves, spew

Special Qualities: Burrow

Saves: Fort +2, Ref -2, Will +4

Abilities: Str 10, Dex 4, Con 13, Int 2, Wis 10, Cha 12

Skills: Listen +5, Search +5

Climate/Terrain: Any underground

Organization: Solitary

Challenge Rating: 2

Treasure: Nil

Alignment: Always neutral

Advancement: 5-12HD (Small)

T'shanns are slug-like creatures that burrow through earth and stone to consume the minerals trapped in the rock. They range anywhere from 2 to 4 feet long, with a cylindrical body and a mass of dripping, writhing tentacles at its head. T'shanns are generally brownish gray, with patches of green and black blotches scattered unevenly over its body. Its underside is pasty off-white in color and ripples with the muscular contractions that move the creature along.

A t'shann burrows through stone by extruding powerful digestive enzymes through its mouth and skin, letting it dissolve the stone, and then slurping it up for consumption. It can use this ability to attack creatures that threaten it.

The most unusual aspect of a t'shann is its ability to cause confusion by its mere presence. The simple but alien brain of a t'shann emits waves in such a frequency that more advanced creatures suffer from severe disorientation.

Combat

T'shanns rarely move to attack. They are content to burrow through rock and dirt, blissfully unaware of the rest of the world. If attacked, however, they will defend themselves.

Alien Thoughts (Su): The alien brainwaves of a t'shann have a bizarre effect on intelligent creatures.

Within 30 feet of a t'shann, all creatures with an Intelligence score greater than 5 must make a Will save (DC 13) or be affected as if by a confusion spell as cast by a 4th level sorcerer. Any creature that

approaches to within 10 feet must make another Will save (DC 13) or suffer a loss of 1d4 points of temporary Intelligence for as long as they remain within 10 feet of the t'shann. Once the character moves out of the 10-foot range of this effect, his Intelligence score immediately returns to normal, although any confusion effects remain until they move more than 30 feet away.

Psionic monsters and creatures, being attuned to the brainwaves of others, suffer these effects at double the normal range; they suffer from confusion if within 60 feet of a t'shann, and Intelligence score loss if within 20 feet.

Spew (Ex): If attacked, a t'shann can emit a spray of powerful acids from nearly every pore on its body, affecting any creature within 10 feet of it. This acidic spray inflicts 1d4 points of acid damage, plus 1 point of damage per round for a further 1d4 rounds. A Reflex save (DC 13) halves this damage.

Burrow (Ex): A t'shann rarely appears in the open air, preferring the closeness and coolness of being deep in the earth. In order to attack a t'shann, a creature must first find it. This requires a Search check (DC 15) to locate the burrow. Getting the t'shann out of the burrow so that it can be attacked is another matter entirely. They can usually be enticed out by being offered some gemstones. A small pile of gems placed at the entrance to its burrow, regardless of value, will automatically draw a t'shann out into the open.

As a boy, I heard the skalds sing of men and heroes who fought and died as legends
in a distant land across the Western Sea.

Their songs told of the walkurie,
warrior queens drunk on the blood of
the gods of war who claimed our heroes with
howls of lust and deafened the halls of
Valhalla.

Our search for gold and the glory of deeds
lured us to this distant land, fearless as our
fathers and brothers before us, certain
our sagas would be immortal.



I too set sail across the Western Sea
to this distant land of spite and fury,
of decadent queens who trembled mountains
and women who warred like gods.

And I called it

MAIDENHEIM

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Cyberzombie's A Murder of Ravens

By Matt "Cyberzombie" Blakeley

Going Beyond Class Skills: Education Skill System

One of the promises of having a skill system in an RPG is that, with it, the characters can go beyond wargame characters into fully fleshed out three dimensional characters. Extensive gaming has shown me, however, that most 3e D&D characters can barely afford their class-related skills, much less a breadth skill like cooking or poetry. In this article, I'm

going to show you a new way for allocating skill points that will allow characters to cook, whittle, or do underwater basket weaving, and still be able to cover their necessary class skills. Additionally, this system will benefit campaigns with low to average ability scores, since the characters will have adequate skill points to cover their most necessary skills.

Under this system, each character will get two sets of skill points. One set will be for their class skills, which can be

used to buy the normal skills provided by their class. The other set will be education skills, which can only be used to buy Craft, Knowledge, Perform, and Profession, along with Literacy and Speak Language as cross-class skills. The Perform skill is also expanded to take advantage of the additional skill points.

Class Skills

The class skill lists remain the same for each class. The base skill points for

Main Ability Scores and CSPs per Level

Barbarian

Class Main Ability Score: Strength
CSPs at 1st Level: (4+Str modifier)x4
CSPs at Each Additional Level: 4+Str modifier

Bard

Class Main Ability Score: Charisma
CSPs at 1st Level: (4+Cha modifier)x4
CSPs at Each Additional Level: 4+Cha modifier

Cleric

Class Main Ability Score: Wisdom
CSPs at 1st Level: (2+Wis modifier)x4
CSPs at Each Additional Level: 2+Wis modifier

Druid

Class Main Ability Score: Wisdom
CSPs at 1st Level: (4+Wis modifier)x4
CSPs at Each Additional Level: 4+Wis modifier

Fighter

Class Main Ability Score: Strength
CSPs at 1st Level: (2+Str modifier)x4
CSPs at Each Additional Level: 2+Str modifier

Monk

Class Main Ability Score: Wisdom
CSPs at 1st Level: (4+Wis modifier)x4
CSPs at Each Additional Level: 4+Wis modifier

Paladin

Class Main Ability Score: Charisma
CSPs at 1st Level: (2+Cha modifier)x4
CSPs at Each Additional Level: 2+Cha modifier

Ranger

Class Main Ability Score: Dexterity
CSPs at 1st Level: (4+Dex modifier)x4
CSPs at Each Additional Level: 4+Dex modifier

Rogue

Class Main Ability Score: Dexterity
CSPs at 1st Level: (8+Dex modifier)x4
CSPs at Each Additional Level: 8+Dex modifier

Sorcerer

Class Main Ability Score: Charisma
CSPs at 1st Level: (2+Cha modifier)x4
CSPs at Each Additional Level: 2+Cha modifier

Wizard

Class Main Ability Score: Intelligence
CSPs at 1st Level: (2+Int modifier)x4
CSPs at Each Additional Level: 2+Int modifier

Adept

Class Main Ability Score: Wisdom
CSPs at 1st Level: (2+Wis modifier)x4
CSPs at Each Additional Level: 2+Wis modifier

Aristocrat

Class Main Ability Score: Charisma
CSPs at 1st Level: (4+Cha modifier)x4
CSPs at Each Additional Level: 4+Cha modifier

Commoner

Class Main Ability Score: Strength
CSPs at 1st Level: (2+Str modifier)x4
CSPs at Each Additional Level: 2+Str modifier

Expert

Class Main Ability Score: Any
CSPs at 1st Level: (6+Any modifier)x4
CSPs at Each Additional Level: 6+Any modifier

Warrior

Class Main Ability Score: Strength
CSPs at 1st Level: (2+Str modifier)x4
CSPs at Each Additional Level: 2+Str modifier

each class also remain the same. However, each class modifies the number of class skill points (CSP) by its main ability score. In the case of wizards, it is still Intelligence. But each class has its own ability score for CSPs, as given on the following table:

Every character gets a minimum of 4 CSPs at 1st level, and a minimum of 1 CSP per level thereafter. Also note that the Cross Training feat below may affect the character's starting skill points.

A special note on Experts: An expert chooses her main ability, just as she chooses which ten skills will be her class skills. Thus, a strong weaponsmith could choose Strength for her main ability score and a healthy herbalist can choose Constitution. Once the expert's main ability score is chosen, it remains fixed for her - she cannot change it later.

Prestige Classes and Class Skills

Prestige classes will each have their own main ability score, depending on its abilities. It's usually not too difficult to figure out which ability is their main score. Their main ability score replaces Intelligence when computing CSPs per level, as with the classes on the table above. The following examples are from the Dungeon Master's Guide:

Arcane Archer: Since their primary focus is archery, their main ability score is Dexterity.

Assassin: This class takes rogue abilities and applies them to killing for hire. It also has Dexterity for its main ability score.

Blackguard: Since this is the twisted, evil shadow of the paladin, it has Charisma as the main ability score.

Dwarven Defender: This class has Endurance, Toughness, and dwarven race as prerequisites, a d12 HD, and many defensive abilities. Given these facts, Constitution is the main ability score for this class.

Foremaster: The emphasis on knowledge makes Intelligence the main ability score for this class.

Shadowdancer: The Shadowdancer is another variation on the rogue class, so it has Dexterity for the main ability score.

Education Skills

In addition to class skill points (CSPs), each character will have education skill points (ESPs). These ESPs can be used to buy Craft, Knowledge, Perform, and Profession skills. These skills are bought as if they were class skills, so they cost only 1 ESP per rank and use the Class Skill Max Ranks column on Table 3-2 of the Player's Handbook.

ESPs can also be used to purchase ranks in Speak Language, but this is treated as if it was a cross-class skill. Each language learned costs 2 ESPs and the maximum number of languages that can be learned from the Speak Language skill is given on the Cross-Class Skill Max Ranks column of Table 3-2.

Barbarians may also use 2 of their ESPs to purchase Literacy.

ESPs CAN NOT be used to purchase any other skills, ever, unless the character has the Unusual Education Feat, described below. Characters that do not have this feat must use all ESPs on the six skills listed above.

Education Main Ability Score: Each character's level of education is tied to their Intelligence score. Thus, Intelligence modifies the number of education skill points that they get.

Education Skill Points at 1st Level: (2 + Int modifier) x4.

Education Skill Points at Each Additional Level: 2 + Int modifier.

Every character gets a minimum of 4 ESPs at 1st level, and a minimum of 1 ESP per level thereafter.

The Perform Skill

Under this system, Perform should become a cascade skill (that is, a group of related skills under one main heading) like Craft, Knowledge, and Profession already are. There are two reasons for this: first, it allows the character to emphasize the particular style of performance that she does. Secondly, it keeps bards from becoming too powerful under this skill system, by giving them more types of performance to learn.

The following types of performance skills are recommended. The player can create additional types for their character with the GM's permission. For the musical instrument skills, the character learns to use one instrument per rank in the skill. The examples below are all from Song & Silence, but the player or GM can add any other instruments appropriate to the campaign setting.

Acting

Chanting

Comedy

Crowd Working

Dance (fascinate and suggestion only)

Drums: Bones, bongo drums, drums, gong, handbell, hanging bells, kettle drums, or tabor.

Horns: Alphorn, herald's trumpet, natural horn, shell horn, or lur.

Keyboards: Clavichord, harpsichord, or pipe organ.

Miming (fascinate and suggestion only)

Oration

Poetry

Singing

Storytelling

String Instrument: Banjolele, fiddle, hammered dulcimer, harp, lap-harp, lute, lyre, mandolin, psalter, or zither.

Woodwind Instrument: Bagpipes, crumhorn, flute, harmonica, hautbois, pan pipes, recorder-flute, shawm, water-pipe, or whistle-pipe

Bards and the Revised Perform Skill

In this system, a bard will likely have a number of different Perform skills and not all of them may be at maximum ranks. A bard can only use her Bardic Music abilities if the individual skill level is high enough.

For example, a 6th level bard might have Perform (Singing) 9, Perform (String Instrument) 6, and Perform (Poetry) 2. If this bard could not sing, but could play one of her stringed instruments, then she could Inspire Competence (which requires 6 ranks of Perform) but she could not use *suggestion* (which requires 9 ranks of Perform). If she regains her ability to sing, she can use her *suggestion* ability again normally. She can't use any of her bardic abilities with her poetry at all, since they all require at least 3 ranks.

Dancing and miming have only limited uses for bards. They can both only be used for the *fascinate* and *suggestion* abilities. This does, however, allow the bard to use these abilities even when under the effects of a *silence* spell or effect.

New Feats

Cross Training (General)

Your initial skill training was unusual for your class.

Benefit: At 1st level only, you can choose which ability score gives your bonus class skill points. For example, an elven fighter might choose to get his bonus CSPs from Dexterity rather than Strength at 1st level. This feat only affects the CSPs you get at 1st level, not at any subsequent levels.

Special: Normally the ability score that affects class skills is fixed by class. You may only take this feat at the 1st character level.

Unusual Education (General)

Your education is broader than most character's.

Benefit: You can pick one skill and add it to your list of education skills. The skill cannot be an exclusive skill, like Animal Empathy or Scry. Alternately, you may instead choose to upgrade Speak Languages to a class skill.

Special: Normally education skill points may only be spent on the Craft, Knowledge, Perform, and Profession skills, and on Speak Languages as a cross-class skill. You can gain this feat multiple times. Each time you take this feat, it applies to a different skill.

Sample Characters

The sample characters in this section are based on the 1st level NPCs in chapter 2 of the Dungeon Master's Guide. All 11 basic classes are presented, along with a likely skill selection, using both the standard rules (as a comparison) and using the new rules. Each sample character below gains a total of 16 skill points and thus 4 additional skills at rank 4 (or cross-class skills at rank 2). Each skill lists only the ranks taken in the skill, not the total adjusted skill level.

Barbarian

(Str 15, Int 10)

Standard Rules, Skill Points: $4x(4+0) = 16$ skill points.

Standard Rules, Skill Picks: Climb 4, Jump 4, Listen 4, Wilderness Lore 4.

Education Skill System, Skill Points: $4x(4+2) = 24$ CSPs; $4x(2+0) = 8$ ESPs.

Education Skill System, Skill Picks: Climb 4, Intimidate 4, Jump 4, Listen 4, Ride 4, Wilderness Lore 4; Craft (Leatherworking) 4, Profession (Herdsman) 4.

Bard

(Int 14, Cha 15)

Standard Rules, Skill Points: $4x(4+2) = 24$ skill points.

Standard Rules, Skill Picks: Bluff 4, Diplomacy 4, Perform 4, Sense Motive 4, Spellcraft 4, Tumbling 4.

Education Skill System, Skill Points: $4x(4+2) = 24$ CSPs; $4x(2+2) = 16$ ESPs.

Education Skill System, Skill Picks:

Bluff 4, Diplomacy 4, Sense Motive 4, Spellcraft 4, Tumbling 4, Use Magic Device 4; Perform (Singing) 4, Perform (Stringed Instrument) 4, Perform (Crowd Working) 4, Craft (Musical Instrument) 4.

Cleric

(Int 10, Wis 15)

Standard Rules, Skill Points: $4x(2+0) = 8$ skill points.

Standard Rules, Skill Picks:

Concentration 4, Spellcraft 4.

Education Skill System, Skill Points:

$4x(2+2) = 16$ CSPs; $4x(2+0) = 8$ ESPs.

Education Skill System, Skill Picks:

Concentration 4, Diplomacy 4, Heal 4, Spellcraft 4; Knowledge (Religion) 4, Profession (Herbalist) 4.

Druid

(Int 12, Wis 15)

Standard Rules, Skill Points: $4x(4+1) = 20$ skill points.

Standard Rules, Skill Picks:

Animal Empathy 4, Concentration 4, Knowledge (Nature) 4, Spellcraft 4, Wilderness Lore 4.

Education Skill System, Skill Points:

$4x(4+2) = 24$ CSPs; $4x(2+1) = 12$ ESPs.

Education Skill System, Skill Picks:

Animal Empathy 4, Concentration 4, Handle Animal 4, Heal 4, Spellcraft 4, Wilderness Lore 4; Craft (Woodcarving) 4, Knowledge (Nature) 4, Profession (Herbalist) 4.

Fighter

(Str 15, Int 10)

Standard Rules, Skill Points: $4x(2+0) = 8$ skill points.

Standard Rules, Skill Picks:

Climb 4, Jump 4.

Education Skill System, Skill Points:

$4x(2+2) = 16$ CSPs; $4x(2+0) = 8$ ESPs.

Education Skill System, Skill Picks: Climb 4, Jump 4, Ride 4, Swim 4; Craft (Weaponsmith) 4, Profession (Siege Engineer) 4.

Monk

(Int 10, Wis 15)

Standard Rules, Skill Points: $4x(4+0) = 16$ skill points.

Standard Rules, Skill Picks: Balance 4, Hide 4, Jump 4, Tumble 4.

Education Skill System, Skill Points: $4x(4+2) = 24$ CSPs; $4x(2+0) = 8$ ESPs.

Education Skill System, Skill Picks: Balance 4, Hide 4, Jump 4, Listen 4, Move Silently 4, Tumble 4; Perform (Chanting) 4, Profession (Brewer) 4.

Paladin

(Int 10, Cha 15)

Standard Rules, Skill Points: $4x(2+0) = 8$ skill points.

Standard Rules, Skill Picks: Heal 4, Ride 4.

Education Skill System, Skill Points: $4x(2+2) = 16$ CSPs; $4x(2+0) = 8$ ESPs.

Education Skill System, Skill Picks: Diplomacy 4, Heal 4, Ride 4, Spot (cc) 2; Knowledge (Nobility and Royalty) 4, Knowledge (Religion) 4.

Ranger

(Dex 15, Int 10)

Standard Rules, Skill Points: $4x(4+0) = 16$ skill points.

Standard Rules, Skill Picks: Hide 4, Move Silently 4, Spot 4, Wilderness Lore 4.

Education Skill System, Skill Points: $4x(4+2) = 24$ CSPs; $4x(2+0) = 8$ ESPs.

Education Skill System, Skill Picks: Animal Empathy 4, Hide 4, Listen 4, Move Silently 4, Spot 4, Wilderness Lore 4; Craft (Bowmaking) 4, Knowledge (Nature) 4.

Rogue

(Dex 15, Int 14)

Standard Rules, Skill Points: $4x(8+2) = 40$ skill points.

Standard Rules, Skill Picks: Appraise 4, Disable Device 4, Hide 4, Listen 4, Move Silently 4, Open Lock 4, Search 4, Spot 4, Tumble 4, Use Magical Device 4.

Education Skill System, Skill Points: $4x(8+2) = 40$ CSPs; $4x(2+2) = 16$ ESPs.

Education Skill System, Skill Picks: Appraise 4, Disable Device 4, Hide 4, Listen 4, Move Silently 4, Open Lock 4, Search 4, Spot 4, Tumble 4, Use Magical Device 4; Craft (Trapmaking) 4, Knowledge (Local) 4, Perform (Storytelling) 4, Speak Language (cc) 2.

Sorcerer

(Int 10, Cha 15)

Standard Rules, Skill Points: $4x(2+0) = 8$ skill points.

Standard Rules, Skill Picks: Concentration 4, Spellcraft 4.

Education Skill System, Skill Points: $4x(2+2) = 16$ CSPs; $4x(2+0) = 8$ ESPs.

Education Skill System, Skill Picks: Concentration 4, Diplomacy (cc) 2, Gather Information (cc) 2, Spellcraft 4; Knowledge (Arcana) 4, Perform (Singing) 4.

Wizard

(Int 15)

Standard Rules, Skill Points: $4x(2+2) = 16$ skill points.

Standard Rules, Skill Picks: Concentration 4, Knowledge (Arcana) 4, Knowledge (The Planes) 4, Spellcraft 4.

Education Skill System, Skill Points: $4x(2+2) = 16$ CSPs; $4x(2+2) = 16$ ESPs.

Education Skill System, Skill Picks: Alchemy 4, Concentration 4, Hide (cc) 2, Spellcraft 4; Craft (Gemcutting) 4, Knowledge (Arcana) 4, Knowledge (History) 4, Knowledge (The Planes) 4. ♦

ReviewsContinued from page 15

powers that tainted characters may acquire.

Appendix two discusses the spirit realms, which may help spread some light on some of your creature explanations. Also, the appendix introduces a few new items such as the aforementioned jade and crystal weapons and further defines their effects.

Appendix three leads off with stock character types for Rokugan character classes (courtier, inkyo, ninja, samurai, and shugenja) from levels 1-20, in the same fashion that the DMG had samples for basic d20 system character classes. This is very convenient for running games off the cuff.

Appendix three provides some guidance as to how to best use creatures as encounters in Rokugan, and advice for adapting creatures from other d20 system products in Rokugan.

Finally, Creatures of Rokugan has a list of creatures by CR. The book features creatures with challenge ratings from ½ to 25.

Conclusion

This is a nice selection of creatures. Most of these are primarily useful in Rokugan or another Oriental Adventures campaigns. However, there are many of these could also be used in fairly typical D&D games. The thought of using animated bone catapults for that army of undead your necromancer summoned or recasting the shadow samurai as a shadow warrior is rather intriguing.

One thing I appreciated a lot about these creatures is that many of them strongly suggest or even demand a solution other than combat. The book is brimming with great creature ideas, and great adventure idea to go with them

Needless to say, I was rather pleased that AEG is maintaining a high level of quality and imagination in their follow-on books to Rokugan. I eagerly await the next one! ♦



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